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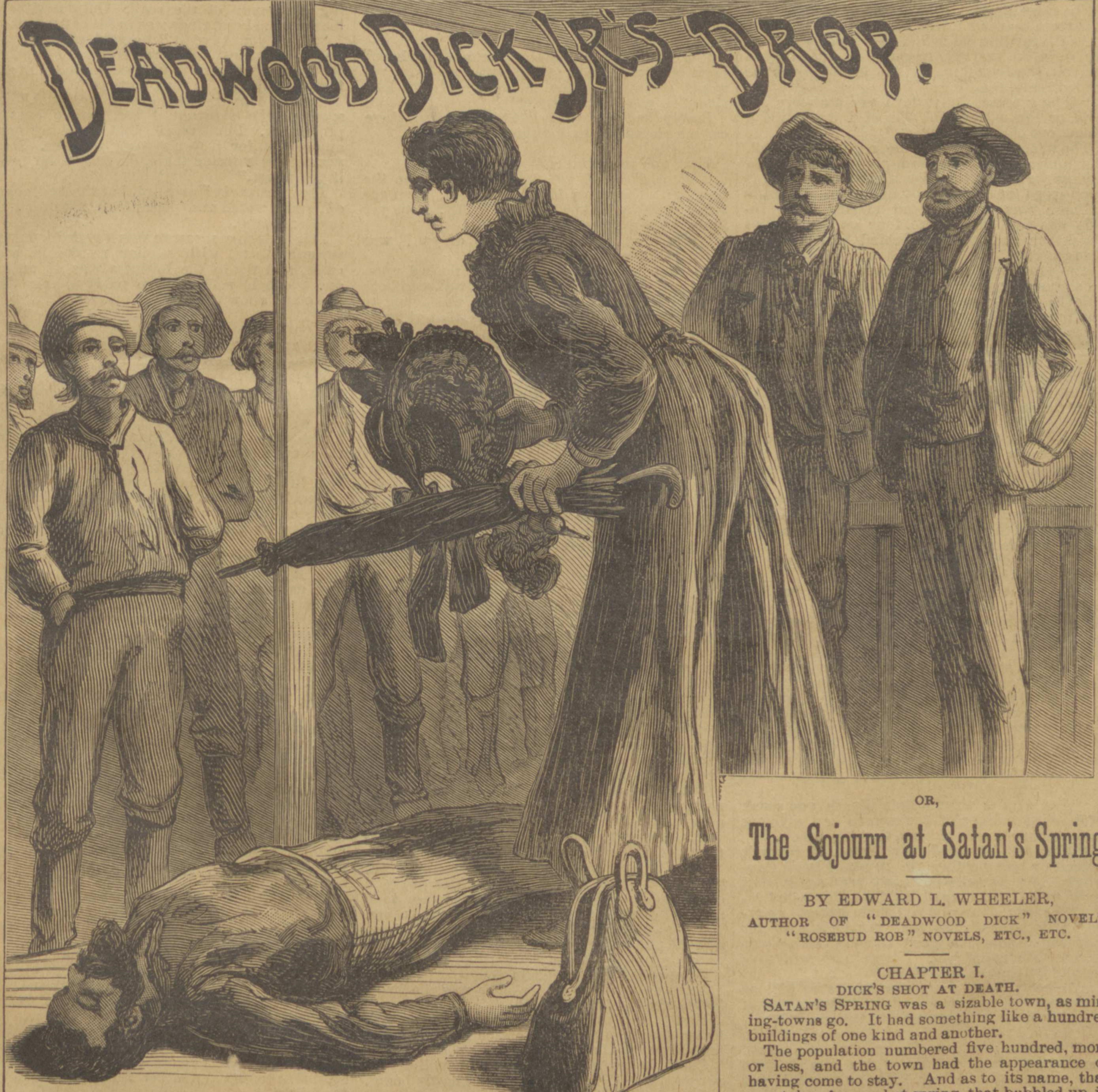
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"YOU ASK WHO I AM, GENTLEMEN; I AM RICHARD M. BRISTOL, BETTER KNOWN AS DETECTIVE DEADWOOD DICK, JUNIOR."

OR, The Sojourn at Satan's Spring.

BY EDWARD L. WHEELER,
AUTHOR OF "DEADWOOD DICK" NOVELS,
"ROSEBUD ROB" NOVELS, ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

DICK'S SHOT AT DEATH.

SATAN'S SPRING was a sizable town, as mining-towns go. It had something like a hundred buildings of one kind and another.

The population numbered five hundred, more or less, and the town had the appearance of having come to stay. And as to its name, that was taken from a hot spring that bubbled up in the center of the little gulch in which the town nestled.

This spring was a wonder in a small way. At intervals of about ten minutes it would begin to hiss and foam, and presently it would be seething away like a boiling caldron, almost over-leaping its rocky basin. Then, after a minute or so, it would quiet down and become calm, as if recovering strength for another effort.

The water of the spring was unfit for any use, being strongly impregnated with alkali, salt, sulphur, and other delightful ingredients, and from the fact of its being hot, too, its discoverer had dedicated it to His Satanic Majesty, dubbing it "Satan's Spring," a name that had never been improved upon; and when the town sprung up in the valley pocket, it took upon itself the same proper title.

The afternoon stage was a little late.

It was due at this growing town of Satan's Spring before sundown.

Now the shades of night were gathering, and it was only just entering into a long, dismal gorge.

This mountain defile was known as Devil Canyon, and was something over four miles long, from its beginning on the south to Satan's Spring. From that point it continued for half a dozen miles further, before it finally terminated in the foot-hills on the northern side of the range, where it was lost to sight from the plains beyond.

The stage stopped over at Satan's Spring, and it is there that our interest centers.

As the rattling old vehicle, that had seen better days on the old Overland, swung into the canyon, the Jehu flung out the lash toward the leaders' ears, shouting:

"G'lang there, Polly, durn yer stubborn old hide, or I'm a-jabberin' ijjit ef I don't bite a chunk out o' both yer years!"

The whip cracked like the report of a pistol, the mules leaped forward, giving the stage a savage jerk, and then went spinning along at good speed into the gloomy and silent canyon.

There was a good load aboard. The inside was full, there were four on top besides the driver, and the rack behind held considerable baggage.

The stage was drawn by four mules, which, on a good many trails, have been found preferable to horses; and sturdy little fellows they had proven to be. So far, the journey had been without mishap.

"Curlin' smoke!" one of the outside passengers exclaimed, when the stage was jerked as mentioned, and he made a grab for the low railing; "why don't yer tell a feller when ye're goin' ter do that? Ye near a'most toppled me overboard."

The driver laughed lightly, as he gathered in the ribbons a little.

"Can't 'tend ter you and these hyer mule-critters at the same time," he declared. "You must be lookin' out fer sich leetle jogs, as I've told ye afore. Yer have got nothin' else ter do but ter hold fast, and ef yer don't 'tend ter business, why et's not my funeral."

"How much further is it to Satan's Spring?" another of the top passengers inquired.

"Et ar' about four miles, now," he was informed. "And et's a straight ride through Devil Canyon all the way. Et's goin' ter be darker'n all git out, afore we git thar, too."

"We can stand that, I guess, if you know the trail well," another passenger spoke up.

"And I don't know of ary cuss that mounts the box what knows et better," the driver proudly asserted. "We'll git thar all safe and sound, you bet, ef Captain Death don't tackle us. Ef he do— Wull, mebbe some of us will ride inter town in our funeral garments, all ready fer plantin'."

"And who is this Captain Death you speak of?" asked another of the men on top, a young man, having a pair of keen, flashing eyes.

"Who ar' he?" the Jehu repeated. "Haven't yer never heard o' Captain Death of Devil Canyon? He's jest the cussedest road-agent that ever took to the trail, an' that I'm tellin' ye. By the way, ef any of you gents has got vallyables about yer clothes that yer don't want ter part with, now is a good time ter amuse yourselves with eatin' 'em. Nothin' else will save 'em, ef we should meet the road-agent."

All heard his words, those inside as well as those on top, and some made a hasty business of slipping their pocketbooks into their boots.

"So that's the sort of chap Captain Death is, eh?" commented the young man who had asked concerning him. "You give him a good recommendation, driver. Has he ever held you up?"

"That he have, and more than onc't, too!" was the answer. "And I kin warn ye all that

he don't make no fool job of et, nuther. He's a terror on high stilts, is that same Captain Death."

"And how came he by such a name as that?" the young man further questioned.

There is something about this young man that seems familiar to us. Is it his voice? Perhaps; but, there is something more. His easy air reminds us of some one we have known. Ha! he is about to light a cigar. Let us watch for a glimpse at his face.

He strikes a match, the flame darts up brightly, and he applies it to the cigar he has just taken from his case. Now is our chance—What! can it be he? Yes, he and none other; he, Richard the redoubtable; he, our Deadwood Dick, Jr.!

"How kem he by sich a handle?" the driver repeated.

"Yes," Dick repeated: "what gave him such a lugubrious appellation?"

"Wull, I opine et kin be laid to two 'counts,'" the driver proceeded to enlighten. "First, 'cause he most gen'lly is death, ter them what don't come down with the'r dudads when he extends ther invite; and nextly, 'cause he's a skil-lytin fer a fact, and yer kin look right through him."

"A skeleton!"

"You'll say so, ef ye ever see ther cuss. Why, yer kin count his ribs, ter say nothin' about every tooth in his grinnin' jaws, ef yer wants ter."

"Well, this is something unique, anyhow," Dick observed, as he puffed away coolly. "It would quite break the monotony of this long ride if he would give us a call."

Barely had the words left his lips when there came a ringing order for the driver to stop.

"Halt!"

That was the command.

"Whoap!" cried the Jehu, clapping on the break and throwing his weight back upon the reins, "whoap! Consarn yer, Polly, don't yer know what manners is yet?"

"Hands up, now, every galoot of you!" was further ordered.

At that instant a bright light flashed upon the scene, coming from the rocky walls on both sides of the stage, and the stage was found to be covered by half a dozen rifles that gleamed from cover here and there.

Just in front of the stage, on the right, and abreast of the wheel-team was a horseman, having a pair of revolvers in hand.

And he was of such appearance as renders him worthy of description.

He was mounted upon a black horse, over which hung a long, funeral-like robe, or cloth, buckled before and behind, and held in place by the saddle-girth passing through it at the sides. The horseman himself wore a loose black cloak, a black slouch hat, and was otherwise clad in sable from crown to foot.

But, the striking thing about him remains to be told. He did not appear to be a man of flesh and blood, but was a skeleton. His face was a grinning skull, his neck was the bare and shining vertebræ, and his open clack revealed his gleaming breast-bones and ribs, while his arms and hands were no exception.

It was a startling sight, and one calculated to take the "nerve" out of any traveler who might encounter such a being on a lonely trail.

All this could be taken in at a quick glance.

When the order for the passengers to raise their hands rung out, all obeyed, but as the hands of Deadwood Dick came up, the right held a revolver in it, and barely had the words left the skeleton road-agent's lips, when Dick fired a snap-shot at him.

But in the same instant, almost, one of the rifles cracked, and Dick's revolver went spinning out of his hand, carried away by a bullet.

His hand was numbed by the shock, but, fortunately, no damage had been done.

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed the grinning skeleton, "did you think to kill Captain Death? You ought to know that death never comes to a mortal but once, and he long ago came to me. But, beware, for another shot like that, from any of you, will signify instant death to the person who fires it."

Deadwood Dick was amazed.

Expert with the revolver as he was, he knew his shot had not missed.

Had this daring highwayman been mortal, he must have tumbled out of the saddle, with a bullet in his body.

Could it be that it was indeed something supernatural? Was it of a verity a ghostly being, endowed with life that was superhuman?

Deadwood Dick put these questions to himself, as seeing that he was for the time being in

the same fix as his fellow-passengers, he, like them, put up his hands in token of submission.

By this time another personage had appeared at the side of the stage, and was requesting:

"Pass out your valuables, now, ladies and gentlemen, and lose no time about it. No use kicking, for you are covered, and any show of resistance will signal your funeral. One at a time now, if you please, and be wise enough not to try any tricks."

In his right hand this fellow held a revolver, cocked and ready, while he extended his left to receive the forthcoming booty.

This man was completely masked, and nothing of his face could be seen.

"Yes," supported the skeleton leader of the band, "pass your wealth over to my assistant. Be as lively about it as you can, too; I don't want to detain you long. And, for your own sake, don't try any more foolishness."

There was no way out of it, so the passengers had to "come down" with as good a grace as possible.

Nor was Deadwood Dick any exception.

But, that was noting to his discredit, for it was one of those cases where the "other fellow" had the best of it.

In another way, though, Richard had the "bulge" on this unearthly and terrible-looking gentleman of the road. Only a tithe of his personal belongings was in his outer pockets.

"There you have it," he said, cheerfully, as he passed it down to the receiver. "I can't say that you're welcome to it, though, and I'm glad there's no more of it than there is."

"Small favors thankfully received," responded the assistant, "and larger ones in proportion. Don't try to hold anything back, any of you, for it won't work with us. Here, you fat party inside there, off with them boots, if you please."

The "fat party" groaned, but the boots came off, and a watch and pocketbook rewarded the further search.

This extreme measure was carried out with several others, with similar results in some cases, and finally the business was at an end and the bold robbers were ready to take their leave and allow the stage to proceed.

CHAPTER II.

THE ARRIVAL AT SATAN'S SPRING.

CAPTAIN DEATH and his rifles still held the stage covered.

The collector's work finished, he closed the bag into which he had dropped the booty. This bag was of the common sachet order, held at his left side by a strap over his right shoulder, after the usual manner.

As he closed it, he put his revolver into his belt, lifted his hat to the exasperated passengers in mock politeness, and walked coolly away up the back trail and out of sight.

A few moments passed, and then Captain Death said:

"Now, then, Ribbon Johnny, you can drive on. It is a pleasure to do business with such a man as you. I'll probably have dealings with you again, but I hope I'll never find it necessary to perforate you. Gather up your strings, now, and go on with your old hearse."

"You'll never find it necessary, you bet!" responded the driver, as he reached for the lines. "I have too much regard for my good health not ter obey orders when they come from you. G'lang there, now, Polly, durn yer old skin, or I'm a cross-eyed kiddle ef I don't cut yer years off, clean! Hold fast back there, you feller what's allus growlin' 'cause I don't warn yer when we're goin' ter start, or yer may git toppled off fer a fact."

The long whip shot forward, cracked savagely, and the four mules started off lively, giving the stage a jerk that, only for the driver's warning, might have deposited the complaining passenger in the road.

"Curlin' smoke!" the fault-finder cried, holding on for life to the rail, "ye near a'most done et anyhow. If I ever ride wi' you again, Ribbon Johnny, I'll git a rope and tie myself fast afore we start, you bet."

This man's name was Tombstone Dan, or rather that was what he was called, owing to the fact that he claimed citizenship in the Arizona town that flourishes under that delectable appellation.

"Thet aire won't be necessary," Ribbon Johnny retorted, "fer ef ye ever ride wi' me again it will be on ther baggage-rack, strapped down with ther trunks and other things what's likely ter fall off."

As the stage had passed Captain Death, the lights went suddenly out, and all was darkness.

It seemed darker than it really was, at first owing to the sudden transition.

"Wull, what d'ye think of Captain Death, by this time?" the driver inquired, when he had turned the next bend, addressing Deadwood Dick.

"He's a good one," Dick acknowledged freely.

"You bet he ar'! Et aire lucky that you didn't get a bullet in yer head, fer that snapshot at him. You was crazy ter try it on."

"So I realized, after I had fired," admitted Dick. "They could have picked me off as well as not. But, I am a fellow who takes long chances, and I thought if I could drop him, we might get away with the rest of the crew."

"Nary time. When Captain Death takes it on ter himself ter hold up a hearse, he knows what he's doin', and you kin bet on his holdin' ther best hand in ther game, too."

"But," inquired one of the other top passengers, "can't nothing be done? Do we have to lose our money and watches like this, and no chance to get 'em back?"

"Thet aire ar' about the size of et," the driver assured. "Yer money and other sinful and unnecessary chattles hev gone where the woodbine twineth, and ther chances is about a thousand ter one that ye'll never see 'em again."

"Then the owners of this stage shall make good the loss," another man declared.

"Which I don't reckon they will," drawled the driver. "This ain't no insurance company, mister. Ef et was, et would be bu'sted in a month."

"We'll see whether they will or not. I have not come West to be robbed and cheated in this high-handed manner, and they'll find it out so. Somebody has got to reimburse me, I don't care who it is."

"Mighty good chance fer you ter distinguish yerself, then, by goin' fer Captain Death himself and makin' him disgorge. There's a big reward offered fer him, and mebby you might corral that, too."

"And I'll see that the reward is made bigger," this passenger promised, angrily.

Introduction to characters may as well be given as they come to the fore in our romance.

This man was one Austin Pilbrooke. He was a stockholder in a mine at Satan's Spring, and had come West to look after his interests.

He was a man of fifty or thereabouts, rather portly, and fine-looking. He had the appearance of a man of business, but it was clear that he was unused to the ways of the Wild West.

The other passengers, inside and out, complained about the loss of their money and other valuables, but, as that was about all they could do, it amounted to nothing.

The only ones who took the matter philosophically were the driver and Deadwood Dick; to them it was not a new experience; by any means.

The old stage rumbled on through the canyon, and finally emerged into the valley pocket into which Satan's Spring was situated.

By this time night had settled down, and the lights of the town had an appearance of welcome to the weary and belated travelers, as they gleamed out brightly ahead in the darkness.

Once clear of the canyon, Ribbon Johnny tightened up on the lines, swung his long whip around with many a snap and crack, shouted at the leaders in his usual way, and the rattling old vehicle went spinning into the town in style.

"Whoop!" the driver cried out finally, drawing up in front of the largest building to be seen.

This building was a hotel, and a sign in front announced it to be the Grand Union Hotel—a rather imposing name for such a place.

The hotel fronted upon a Square, a usual feature of your Southwestern towns, by the way; and in the middle of the Square was the spring from which the town derived its name.

Other buildings of various sorts were on the Square, or Plaza, all of them well lighted, and a goodly number of them saloons, another usual feature.

"Whoop!" and he put on the break, bringing the "hearse" to a stop.

Immediately a crowd began to collect, pouring out of the hotel and other buildings near by.

"Hyer we be," Ribbon Johnny shouted, "all that Captain Death hev left of us, which ain't much ter speak of. I've brought ye a bu'sted crowd, landlord, and you kin undertake ter board 'em fer their clothes or not, jest as ye please."

This was addressed to a tall, red-shirted, bald-headed man who followed the crowd out of the bar-room of the Grand Union.

Benjamin Benson was the name this man answered to, but he answered oftener to plain "Baldy" Benson.

"Why, hev Captain Death gone through ye again?" he inquired.

"I should smile ef he hadn't," was the assurance.

Questions and answers flew thick and fast, then, while the passengers got down and out and fled into the house.

Among the inside passengers was a veiled woman, whose age could not be guessed, who seemingly had no escort, since she made her way alone to the private entrance of the hotel.

By the time the mail had been handed out, and the baggage taken down from the rack, the driver had given a fair account of the robbery, and the crowd began to disperse, many returning to the bar-room.

The landlord had assumed his place behind the bar, which answered the purpose of office-desk as well.

Austin Pilbrooke had just stepped up to make some inquiry.

"Is there a man in your town named Casper Appleby?" he was heard to ask.

"I ruther opine ther' is," was the answer. "That aire is ther gentleman, right over thar. Mister Appleby, a man askin' fer you, sir."

The person indicated was a man of forty-five, tall, dark-visaged, and wearing a close-cut black beard. He was clad in a plain suit of some serviceable material, and wore a black felt hat.

He came immediately forward, asking:

"Have I the pleasure of greeting Mr. Austin Pilbrooke?"

"That is my name, sir," the new-comer assured.

Appleby offered his hand, giving Pilbrooke a hearty shake, and the two turned away together, talking.

The other passengers pressed forward, now, inquiring for rooms, and the landlord shoved his register out before them for their names.

Deadwood Dick was among the number, and when it came his turn he put his name down in his usual bold way—

"RICHARD M. BRISTOL."

Just behind him was a young man, another of those who had come by the stage, and as Dick's name fell, bold and black upon the page, this man gave a start, looked at Dick sharply, and turned away.

Dick saw nothing of this, but stepped back, when he had finished with the business in hand, and took a turn around the room.

He looked at faces to see if any were there whom he knew.

Finding none, he gave attention to some pictures and notices upon the walls, while he awaited the call to supper.

Presently his eyes fell upon something that drew his attention.

It was a reward of a thousand dollars offered for the capture of the outlaw known as Captain Death, and was signed by Casper Appleby.

"Which seems to indicate that Captain Death is wanted," Dick mused. "Not a very big reward, though, but probably fair for this camp. However, I think the man who undertakes to gather in Captain Death will earn it if he gets it."

He went on around the room, finally bringing up again at the bar, where the last of the passengers was just bending over the register.

And this one was the man who had started at seeing Dick's name, as it dropped from the pen.

Dick glanced at him, remembered him as one of the passengers, but gave him no further attention. He was evidently a stranger to the detective adventurer.

This man's name, as he wrote it, was Hubert Watkyns.

Presently the landlord was summoned away, and calling a man out of the room to take his place for a moment, he disappeared.

When he returned, after an absence of a few minutes, he turned the register of the house to face him, and entered a name upon its page under the others.

Deadwood Dick rightly guessed that he was entering the name of the woman who had come by the stage, and when the landlord shoved the book away from him, Dick turned it to learn what her name was, having had some curiosity to know something about her. As he did so, the eyes of Hubert Watkyns were upon him.

CHAPTER III.

THE GAUNTLET FLUNG DOWN.

The name told him nothing. It was not a striking one, but musical to a degree. There was no prefix to it, so Dick was as much in the

dark as ever regarding its owner. Whether she was old or young, he could not determine, though from her form and carriage he had decided that she was not old.

Jessie Worthington was the signature the landlord had penned, and as Dick repeated it in mind the impression grew upon him that she was young, and, as a natural sequence, he pictured her in his mind's eye as beautiful.

In a little time there came a call to supper, and the tired and hungry stage passengers filed into the dining-room.

Deadwood Dick looked to find the woman there, but she was not; nor did she appear.

Determined to learn what he could about her, he put a question to a young woman, the landlord's daughter, who was waiting upon the table.

"Where's the young lady who came on the stage with us?" he asked.

He spoke of her as a young lady, to see whether it would be denied that she was such.

"She was too tired to come down," the young woman made answer, "so she's taking her supper up-stairs."

Finding that his assumption was not disputed, Dick decided that the impression he had formed was correct.

"And I do not wonder that she is tired," spoke up Hubert Watkyns. "I am almost used up myself. Feel too tired to enjoy my supper. How is it with you, Mr. Bristol?"

"Well, I feel a little weary," Dick responded, "but I guess a quiet smoke on the porch after supper will fix me up all right. I'm pretty well used to hard knocks of this sort, and don't mind it much."

"As for me," put in Tombstone Dan, "I'm sore in every muscle from holdin' on to that aire infernal old hearse. Curlin' smoke! but I kem near a'most gettin' toppled off more'n a thousand times. Ye'll never ketch me ridin' out on top again, not ef I know myself, and I opine I do."

Presently Austin Pilbrooke and Casper Appleby came in, and while Pilbrooke was eating they kept up a low and earnest conversation.

The first one to leave the room was Watkyns.

Reasserting that he was too tired to eat, after doing half justice to the meal, he went out.

None of the others were similarly afflicted, though, and all paid due attention to the cravings of the inner man before leaving the table.

The last to go out, except Pilbrooke and Appleby, was Deadwood Dick.

When he returned to the bar-room, he stepped to the bar to get some cigars, his case having been emptied on the road.

"Are you ther feller what signed himself Bristol?" the landlord asked, as he set out his best brand.

"Yes, I'm the man," Dick assured. "Why do you ask?"

"'Cause, hyer's a letter what I found hyer on ther bar, wi' yer name on et, and I thort mebby you'd left it."

"I had no letter," said Dick. "Let's see it."

Baldy Benson put it in his hand.

It was a white envelope, sealed, and on it was Dick's name in full—

RICHARD M. BRISTOL.

Dick studied the writing a moment before opening the envelope.

It was a puzzle to him. He had never seen it before, to his knowledge, and he could hardly decide whether it was a man's or a woman's.

Finding that nothing was to be learned from further speculation in that direction, he presently tore the envelope open and drew forth the paper contained within.

It proved to be a half-sheet, and the writing was in pencil, the same as that on the envelope.

Spreading it out under the light, Dick read:

"DEADWOOD DICK."

"I do not know what brings you to Satan's Spring, but if it is business, you had better look out for yourself. We do not need any of your sort of business around here, and you had better take this as a friendly warning and get out. If you do not, you may live long enough to be sorry you ever came here."

"ONE WHO KNOWS YOU."

Dick smiled as he read.

"One who knows me, eh?" he mused. "Well, it is plain that it is one who does not know me very well, or he—or she—would know that I am not the man to be frightened off by anything of this sort. Richard, my boy, we'll stay, and see this thing to the end."

He folded the paper, returned it to the envelope, and put it in his pocket.

Lighting a cigar, then, and filling his case, he tossed a coin to the landlord and sauntered out upon the piazza.

Finding a chair, he settled himself in it comfortably, put his feet up on the rail, and proceeded to get a little enjoyment out of the evening hour.

The air was beginning to grow refreshing, after the heat of the day, and Dick soon felt at peace with himself and all the world, as he sat and smoked, watching the periodical ebullitions of the spring in the Plaza.

The evening was by no means quiet, and as the hour advanced it became less and less so. The saloons all around the Square were doing a thriving business, and from many of them strains of music, if it could be called music, floated out upon the evening air.

Shouting and singing were heard on every hand, and now and then a little set-to between some would-be champions of the local gladiatorial arena, would break the monotony of things and cause a ripple of excitement while the "scrimmage" lasted, which was generally not very long.

On that side of the Square on Dick's right, was the largest of the saloons, and there the most of the "fun" seemed to be going on. A big transparent sign over the doors set forth its name in letters a foot high—"TIGER'S JUNGLE."

By and by out from this place rushed a man, who, judging by his appearance and actions, might well be taken for the "tiger" of the "jungle" himself.

He was a big man, deep of chest and broad of shoulder, with a tangle of red hair and beard all over his head and face. He was bareheaded and in his shirt-sleeves, and he came out with a wild yell and a flourish of his arms.

"Hyer I come!" he screamed, "ther untame' hyena of the tiger's jungle fer a fact! Make room fer me, boyees, or by the ragin' old earthquake what swelled ther moon ef I don't jest everlastin' ernihilate a dozen or two of ye! Out of my way, I'm shoutin', or somebody will git hurt! I'm lookin' fer fight, I be, and don't ye fergit it! Whoop-ee!"

And so exclaiming as he advanced, he made straight for the Grand Union, a big crowd following at his heels.

This individual was one Noah High, by name proper, but far better known as "High-hoss Noah," a name that was expressive of his character to a degree.

He was generally on a "high horse" whenever he had a little of the fiery element aboard, and as he was seldom without that, his mount was usually considerably elevated.

On he came, at a run and a jump, as playfully as a frisky lambkin but as belligerous as a warring ram.

"Yas, hyer I be," he repeated, as he squared himself in front of the hotel porch, "ther great old corkscrew whirlwind what devastated ther land of Yejupt! Ther ugly old cattymount what clawed out ther eyes of forty-seven tigers all ter onct in a fair fight! Hear me scream—Waugghhh! Don't et jest curdle yer blood? Come right out hyer, now, any galoot what thinks he's got fight in him, an' see how quick I kin knock ther consate out of him."

It was a generous invitation, but no one seemed inclined to accept it.

"Don't git skart afore ye git hurt," the fellow shouted. "Don't cry afore ye git spanked, leetle cheeldren. But, ef thar is ary galoot amongst ye what wants a leetle touchin' up, jest let him amble right out hyer and see how quick his uncle kin do it fer him. I'm cock of ther walk hyer at Satan's Spring, I be, and thar ain't ary citizen what kin do me up. Thinkin' that mebby some fighter hev come in by ther stage, though, I'm hyer ter challenge him fer ther spurs. Oh! I'm a reg'lar old-style rooster of ther barnyard breed, I be, and me name aire High-hoss Noah. Come, somebody, and git a purty pictur' painted on yer eye!"

Still no one offered to lend his person for this giant's amusement.

Deadwood Dick paid no attention to him whatever, further than to smile in an amused way at his boastings.

He kept his seat and smoked calmly on, and had neither desire nor intention of getting into trouble with anybody that evening.

Tombstone Dan was on the porch, too, and finally the eyes of the fighting man of the town fell upon him and he gave voice to a personal challenge.

"You feller theer," he sung out, pointing at Tombstone Dan, "you cuss with ther big nose, jest prance out hyer and let me bu'st yer bugle fer ye! You look as if you kin fight a leetle bit, you do, so jest trot out hyer and take a lesson from yer dad! I'll bet my old hat again' your boots that I kin show yer some tricks what yer never heard of! Come, what d'y'e say?"

Now it happened that this same Tombstone Dan was something of a fighter; but, on this occasion he had no desire to engage in a "circus." He was too far used up by the long, hard journey he had come.

"No, thank yer; not this evenin'," he responded. "Some other evenin', mebby. I'm too tired jest now, ter stand up, let alone fight. Besides, I have no idee but what you kin do me up."

"Some other evenin', eh?" cried High-hoss Noah. "I takes that fer a mean way of sneakin' out of a hole, I does. If you kin fight me some other evenin', mister, yer kin fight me now. Come-right down off o' that aire porch, now, or I'll come up thar and pitch yer off! You hear me yaup? I'm ther great old blizzard from ther nor'west, I be; ther glitterin' old war-hoss from ther regions beyant! Come, don't yer hear me call? I'll give ye jest two seconds, and ef yer ain't hyer then, I'll come up thar and boot yer! Yaaaa-aa-aahh!"

Now this sort of talk made Mr. Tombstone Dan feel inclined to test the matter. He was a fellow of about the same ilk at home, and this was a little more than he was inclined to stand, tamely.

"Curlin' smoke!" he cried, "ef yer is bound ter force et on ter me, I s'pose I might as well oblige ye. Mebby you kin pick me up and set down on me, mister, and mebby ye can't. Anyhow, if ye're bound ter have et, here goes fer ye!"

With that Tombstone Dan flung off hat and coat and jumped to the ground.

High-hoss Noah was ready to receive him, and at it they went, like a pair of Kilkenny cats.

The loud-mouthed boasting of the bullwhacker had attracted attention, and now there was a big crowd on hand to witness the mill. This was just the sort of fun that suited the majority of the citizens, too.

CHAPTER IV.

DICK TAKES A HAND.

TOMBSTONE DAN soon proved that he was no boy or tenderfoot. He succeeded in depositing one of his fists against the cheek of High-hoss with telling effect, at which Noah uttered a bellow that might have been heard a mile, and went into the business of the moment with vim.

"Got in one on me, did yer!" he cried. "Hit me one clip, did yer! Yer can't do et again, not fer ther dudads yer can't! Hyer I am, ther double-j'nted old hippopotamus from yander!"

"Curlin' smoke!" exclaimed Tombstone, as he got a feeler in return, "but I bet I'll pay that aire back wi' interest, me screamin' coyote! Ef I don't twist ye up an' tie ye inter a double-bow knot, then ye kin take my head fer a cabbage! Mind yer eye, now, fer hyer I come on ther fu'st bounce!"

And now they were going into it, tooth and nail, and in a way that was calculated to make the fur fly.

Tombstone Dan was a good man, in a fight of this sort, where there was no particular amount of science on either side, but, in a little while it began to be seen that High-hoss Noah was a better, and only a little time later Dan got a clean knock-out, straight.

"Whoop-ee!" cried High-hoss, jumping up and cracking his heels together, "ye see how et war done; jest a simple twist of ther wrist and a flip of ther thumb, and his name war Dennis! Come, me warblin' kioodle, git up on yer pins till I do et fer ye again. Oh, but this hyer ar' ther most fun I hev had in a dog's age, et ar'! Come ter time, me hearty, and let me finish ther good work I hev begun."

Tombstone Dan was coming; one knock-out was not enough to cool his ardor.

He gathered himself together as soon as he could, and once more lent himself for the amusement of the crowd.

"Ef yer kin do that ergain," he cried, "I'll holler 'nuff! But I'll bet yer can't! I'm Tombstone Dan from Tombstone, I am, and I most gen'ly eat a man or two ter sharpen me appetite fer breakfast every mornin'. Come fer me, now, and see ef yer kin do that aire purty trick jest onct more fer luck."

Once more the two fellows sprung together, and into the thing they plunged, regardless of everything.

They gave each other some terrible blows, for a few moments, but Tombstone's were far the weaker, now, and pretty soon he received a stunner that sent him spinning end over end and laid him out kicking.

"Hooray!" screamed the victorious High-hoss, as he jumped up and cracked his heels together again. "That's ther way I do et when I gits

me hands in! Did anybody count ther turns he made? Ef he'll only come ter time onct more, I'll send him over like a pin-wheel! Whoop-ee! Anybody else want some? Now I've got me hand in, and I kin tackle any two of ye that has a mind ter step up. Look hyer, me gallus dude, mebby you would like ter come and board wi' yer uncle fer a leetle while!"

Deadwood Dick had been smoking peacefully during the melee, and had not taken his feet down from the rail.

This fight was nothing to him, and if the two fellows wanted to pound each other for the fun of it, he was willing they should enjoy themselves.

But now, and all of a sudden, too, the course of events took a sudden and unexpected turn, and Deadwood Dick found himself in a position that was by no means agreeable to a man of his temperament.

As the "fighter of" the town uttered his closing remark, he sprung suddenly forward, laid hold of Dick's feet as they rested on the rail, and before Dick could make a move toward saving himself he was toppled over backward, landing in a very ungraceful heap on the floor.

"Haw! haw! haw!" laughed the bearded giant, throwing back his head and giving out a jackass bray that was like a small foghorn out of tune, "but wasn't that aire done neat?"

And the crowd joined in the laugh at Dick's expense, as he proceeded to get up leisurely from his undesirable position.

"We don't want no dudes 'round hyer," the big ruffian cried. "You was takin' things too easy ter suit our ideas of ther fitness of things hyer, yer was, and I thort I'd let ye take a drop to yourself. Haw! haw! haw! but he did drop, didn't he, me boyees!"

The town tough was a head taller than Dick, and larger in proportion, and he had no idea that any trouble would follow his playful trick.

But he reckoned without his host, as he presently came to know.

Dick got up, leisurely, as said, and brushed the dust from his clothes as though the matter was to end.

"Anybody else want a taste of ther pie?" the bullwhacker shouted. "Ef any of you galoots wants ter try yer luck, jest step right up to ther office. Hyer I be, the screamin' cattymount from ther rollin' prairies, ready ter lick twicet me weight in cat, dog or man! Whoop-ee! Who'll be ther next ter try a sample? I'll tackle ary two or three of yer that wants ter wade in. Oh! I'm ther—"

"Don't get any more contracts on your hands, my friend, till you are done with this one."

It was Deadwood Dick who spoke, and the big bully turning round, saw that his "dude" was facing him.

And he saw that he was ready for business, too, a thing that evidently surprised him not a little. He had not looked for this.

But, putting a bold face on the matter, he broke out:

"Haw! haw! haw! Why, sonny, what d'ye want o' me? Do yer want me ter turn ye up and spank yer? That's what I'll have ter do, ef you don't run into ther house like a good leetle boy, and go ter bed. Come, et ar' time leetle boyees war all in their leetle beds."

The crowd laughed more heartily than ever.

Here was fun enough for the whole town. More fun than they had had in a week before.

"What did you take hold of my feet and push me over for?" Dick inquired, in his cool way.

"What did I do et fer? Wull, now, sonny, ther aire ar' a fine question ter be askin' of a man o' my size and years. I done et fer fun, though, ef yer want ter know right bad."

"You did it for fun, eh?"

"Yas, ter be sure. Must be doin' somethin' ter keep ther blood movin', when times is dull."

"Then you are troubled with stagnation of the blood, are you?"

"Wull, yas, to a sartain degree. But, say, what ar' you goin' ter do about et?"

"I shall proceed to show you, sir, immediately," Dick assured, grimly. "If your blood wants stirring up, I'll see if I can't make it move for you. Come, now, square yourself."

"Yer don't mean et!" the fellow gasped, incredulously. "Yer don't mean ter say that you want ter fight me!"

"Of course I mean it," Dick impressed. "If you don't want to fight, after what you have done, I'll take you and throw you into that spring there, head and heels."

The High-hoss could not believe that he heard aright.

"Throw me inter ther spring!" he repeated, slowly, as though trying to grasp it; "why, sonny, yer couldn't throw my old hat inter ther

spring, let alone me. Come, sonny, run along now, afore I have ter pull yer ear fer ye."

"I can't seem to impress it upon you that I mean business," observed Dick.

"And do yer mean business, really?" High-hoss asked, in the most sneering manner he could assume.

"Take that for your answer!"

With the words, Dick reached out suddenly and gave the fellow a ringing slap on the cheek.

That opened the ball, to express it tersely, in about the shortest time imaginable. It aroused the giant to immediate action.

"Whoop-ee!" he screamed. "Did yer see that, boyees? Did yer see ther leetle cuss slap my face? Durn my old socks ef I don't take him and give him a bath in ther spring! Slap me in ther face, wull ye, young one! Why, et war ther wu'st job ye ever done in yer life!"

"Was it?" taunted Dick. "Well, there you have it again, just for luck."

He reached out and gave the fellow another smarting open-hander on the other side of the face.

That was enough. The bullwhacker gave out a roar like a tiger, gave a spring forward, both arms extended to grasp Dick in their terrible embrace.

The next instant he was lying flat out upon his back on the ground.

Dick's iron-like fist had met him on the forehead with a kiss that sounded like the crack of a whip, and over he went.

Then the crowd broke out into a cheer, glad enough to see the terror of the town getting his deserts at last.

"I hated to dirty my hands with the fellow, gentlemen," Dick remarked, calmly and coolly, "but you all saw what he did to me. It was a little more than I could put up with, seeing that I was saying nothing to him."

"Serves him right!" some one cried. "Give him another dose of ther same medicine!"

High-hoss Noah was scrambling to his feet, by this time, and he was bellowing like a bull.

"Whoop-ee!" he howled. "Jest let me at him, now, and see what I'll do with him! Didn't want ter dirty yer hands with me, didn't yer! Served me right, did et! I'll show yer, fer I'll eat ye alive, I will, sure's I'm a ragin' tornader! Hyer I come, now, ter do et!"

"Come right on," Dick invited. "You will only get some more of the same kind of syrup. I keep it on tap, and when it is running it is free to all. Wade right in, now, and take satisfaction."

"Yas, I'm comin', you kin bet I be!" screamed the bullwhacker. "And thar won't be a grease-spot left of yer, when I git done, nuther."

"That is where we hold different opinions," answered Dick. "But, the proof of the pudding is the eating."

"And I'll do ther eatin', you bet!"

In he rushed, arms swinging, as though he intended to knock the redoubtable Richard clear over the range.

Dick stood calmly awaiting his attack, and as soon as he was near enough, let him have another stinging blow in the face that sent him to the earth once more.

This raised a bowl. Up scrambled Noah, whipping out a knife as he did so, and with murder in his eyes, rushed at Dick with the intention of killing him. It was a moment of terrible suspense for the lookers-on.

CHAPTER V.

A THRILLING DISCOVERY.

BUT, Deadwood Dick was ready to meet the half-crazed bullwhacker; it was not the first time by a good many that he had faced death in a similar form.

Not a person there, we may venture to say, who did not expect to see him go down to his death under the giant's knife, and yet, not a person offered him any assistance. In truth, there was no time, had any one been so inclined, for the fellow was upon Dick in a moment.

Dick let him come quite near, before he made a move to defend himself, but, just as the ruffian drew back the knife to strike, Dick acted.

His right leg was lifted suddenly, and his heel was planted with force upon the rascal's breast, bringing him to a stop with a quickness that almost snapped his head off, while the knife went flying out of his hand and away off into the crowd.

"So, that was your game, was it?" Dick remarked, calmly. "I always raise a point of objection to such proceedings. If there is one thing more than another that I am opposed to,

it is to being probed with a knife. Sorry to spoil your fun, but that is a rule with me to which I allow no exceptions."

"Cuss yer!" the bullwhacker screamed, "what did yer kick me fer?" Don't yer know that I'm ther great old ring-tailed tiger from ther tiger headquarters? Ef I don't jest everlastin' chaw ye up, now, yer kin jerk me out of me clothes and kick me four times around ther Plazer! Waugh! I'm on ther war-path fer blood now, and I mean ter have some! Look out fer me!"

"Come right along, my ring-tailed chimpanzee," Dick invited. "This is your own circus, you know. You struck up the music, and now you'll have to dance till the band stops playing. Come up to the mark, my beauty, if it is blood you are thirsting for. All the blood you will get, though, will be a bloody nose, I'm thinking."

"Waugh!" the bullwhacker screamed again. "Did yer hear what he called me, fellers? Nothin' but his nose will saterfy thatt aire insult! I'm goin' fer your nose, mister, and I'm goin' ter chaw it off! Hyer I come!"

But the fellow's loud talk and vain boastings did not win for him the battle. He had picked up a hot potato this time, so to say, and he knew it. He was rather wary how he went into the fight further.

His reputation was at stake, though, and he was forced to do something in the hope of saving that. It would never do for him to allow a man of Dick's size to whip him in a fair fight. He himself had begun it, too, and he must see it out no matter what the cost.

He rushed in again, presently, but he might as well have bucked against a stone wall. Indeed, it would have been better for him to have tackled a wall, for then it would have been a matter of simple resistance without retaliation.

Dick allowed him to come in and paw away at the air for a while, for he had no trouble to dodge his blows, and then when Mr. High-hoss began to weaken he hit him a clip that turned him end over end once more.

The crowd yelled and hooted till it was hoarse.

Never had the town of Satan's Spring seen anything like this, though it had seen some frisky scrimmages in its day.

High-hoss Noah knew now for certain that he had found more than his match, but he died hard. He did not like to give up. It would never do for him to own that he was whipped.

Up he got again, with a cry that was a commingled scream and roar, and at Dick he rushed blindly, fiercely.

Dick's fist met him, but the fellow's momentum was too great to admit of a knock-down this time, and the next moment he had Dick in his embrace!

At once Dick was swung off his feet, whirled around, and the bullwhacker dashed him down with all the strength he could bring into play for the effort.

But, even in that, a surprise awaited him. Dick landed upon his feet with the agility of a cat, and the bullwhacker's strength being spent, for the instant, it was his turn to take the brunt.

Before the fellow could recover, Dick had him in his arms, and then, with a display of strength that no one had deemed possible, raised him above his head and held him there. But even then he did not know what to do with him, for he did not want to kill or maim the brute.

"What shall I do with him, men of Satan's Spring?" he demanded. "You saw the trick he served me, and the way he went for me with his knife."

"Kill ther cuss!" shouted some.

"Bite his years off!" advised others.

"No, no," sung out some one else, "don't do that; throw him inter ther spring and give him his first bath of ther season!"

"Won't it scald him?" Dick asked, as that idea struck him favorably.

"No, et won't burn him now; et ar' some minutes sence she bubbled. Inter ther spring with ther cuss! Et wull do him good!"

"All right, into the spring he goes, then," agreed Dick, "and if he gets cooked the rest of you fire-eaters can have him for breakfast. If he don't, it may teach him a lesson."

So, with the fellow still over his head, one hand holding his belt and the other the back of his neck, Dick made a run for the spring, Mr. High-hoss Noah kicking and squirming his best to escape his promised fate.

The spring was not far away, and Dick was soon there with his burden.

"Let up! let up!" the ruffian cried. "Don't heave me in thar, fer ef ye do, she'll bubble up an' cook me!"

"Just what such a dirty scamp deserves!"

cried Dick. "One, two, three, and away you go!"

With the word "three," he gave the giant a toss, and into the spring he went, with a "ker-splash" that sent the water flying in every direction.

The crowd sent up a howl of approval, and all gathered around the rocky basin to see how the town terror would enjoy his warm bath, for warm the water was, most decidedly.

At first, the fellow sunk out of sight, but the water was too heavy to allow him to sink very far, and the next moment he bobbed to the surface and floated like a bad egg in a tub of brine. Then the bellow that escaped him would have shamed a buffalo bull.

"Wha-a-o-ough!" he shrieked. "Help me out! help me out! The meat are' bein' cooked off me bones! I'm scaldin' to a blister! Help! help! Git me out of hyer afore she b'iles, or I'm a dead man! Help! help!"

"How do you like it?" asked Deadwood Dick.

"Help me out!" High-hoss cried. "Don't let me cook up, mister!"

"You hadn't ought to kick," said Dick. "You had some fun with me, and now I'm havin' a little with you. We'll make soup of ye, and then we'll call the coyotes of the plains to a feast, if they'll eat it."

"Oh! help me out! help me out!" the cowed giant begged. "Don't let me burn up in this hyer hole! I hollers 'nuff, I does! I won't tackle ye no more, mister, I sw'ar I won't! Only git me out afore she bubbles!"

"Are you sorry for your misconduct?"

"Yas, yas! Do fer ther love of goodness git me out!"

"And you won't do so any more?"

"No, no! I promise ye I won't bother ye any more!"

"And you beg my pardon for what you have done?"

"Yas, yas! Anything! Only git me out o' hyer afore she b'iles!"

"Very well. Men, help the miserable cur out," Dick directed, and he turned away.

There were indications, now, that the spring was about to boil again, so some of the crowd made haste to get Mr. High-hoss out.

And they were none too soon, either, for he had not been out half a minute when the spring was boiling away at a fierce rate, and he would have found it most decidedly uncomfortable had he been there.

Most of the crowd had followed Dick, cheering him as they retraced their way to the hotel.

And in the crowd was Tombstone Dan, cheering with the loudest.

One of his eyes was closed up, and he held his hand over it, but he forced his way to Dick, and extended his other hand, exclaiming:

"Pardner, shake! You are a he-hoss, you be, and it's me what says so! Culin' smoke! but you did do thatt aire fine, and I'm jest as proud over et as though I'd done et meself! I'm jest as much obliged to yer, I am, as though you'd give me a thousand dollars, spot cash, in ther clean kerdooleum."

"And you're welcome, I'm sure," responded Dick. "I didn't do it on your account, though, but on my own."

"No matter 'bout that; I'm 'bliged to yer jest ther same."

"Yas, et war done neat," cried some one else in the throng, "but you wants ter keep yer top eye peeled fer High-hoss Noah, now, mister."

"And that I'll try to do," Dick assured.

"He ar' p'izen death, he ar', and he'll be on yer trail wi' blood in his eye, now. You'll have ter be on ther watch fer him."

By this time they had regained the porch of the hotel, and there some one proposed three cheers for the new chief of Satan's Spring, and they were given with a will.

And as a "chief" Dick was looked upon.

Any man who could "jump on" High-hoss Noah, and "do him up" at such short notice, deserved the title.

But, in the mean time, what of the parboiled bullwhacker?

No sooner had he been helped out of the spring, then he began to bluster and threaten what he would do.

But his power was broken, now, and he was laughed at. He was advised that about the best thing he could do, would be to slink off home and go to bed.

He stormed around for a time, calling loudly for his "dude" to come out and give him satisfaction, but, as Deadwood Dick paid no further attention to him, he finally made his way back to the Tiger's Jungle, where he proceeded to take satisfaction of another sort.

Like a conquering hero he had come forth; he went back like a whipped cur.

But the one thought of revenge burned in his brutish brain.

Deadwood Dick entered the bar-room, with the intention of soon seeking his room for the night. It was still early, but he was tired, and disgusted with the affair of fisticuffs that had been forced upon him, wanted to get away; so he called for his candle, and made his way up to his room.

But, there a surprise awaited him. Resting on two chairs, by the side of the bed, was an open coffin!

Dick gave a start, steel-nerved as he was. What was the meaning of this? It must be that he had entered the wrong room. No, for this was the one his key called for. Stepping forward, he looked into the coffin. It was empty, but in the bottom lay a card on which was printed, in big letters, the name—

"DEADWOOD DICK."

CHAPTER VI.

VOICES FROM BELOW.

WHAT did it mean?

Dick stood and looked at the name in the coffin, trying to think.

Who was there at Satan's Spring who knew him? He could not imagine, but it was not to be doubted that some one did.

In the first place, there was the warning note he had received, and now came this more terrible and more significant warning—a coffin ready for his reception!

But Dick Bristol was worth a dozen dead men yet.

Putting down his light on a table, he took the card out of the coffin and looked to see if it contained anything more.

There was nothing on it but the name, so he tore it up and threw it away as useless, then he sat down to give the matter a little study.

First of all, some person or persons here knew him. Next, they had no friendship for him, that was clear. Who could they be?

But, that was a vain question, since he could not guess.

"They are too much interested in me by half," he mused. "When a man finds a coffin provided for himself, then it is about time for him to inquire who his over-considerate friends are. A coffin provided for Deadwood Dick, eh? Well, now, I don't believe I am ready for my wooden overcoat yet. A coffin is a good thing to have when it is wanted bad, but it is never wanted bad till it's needed, and I don't feel the need of one just now."

So he communed with himself, while he turned the affair over in his mind, the question what he should do about it. He was inclined to shove the thing under the bed, and go to bed, but further thought led him to change his mind.

He left the room and went down to the bar room, where he spoke quietly to the landlord.

"Do you make it a rule to supply your guests with coffins, landlord?" he inquired, soberly.

Baldy Benson looked at him in amazement.

"No, I opine not," he answered. "What makes yer ask sich a question es that aire?"

"You booked me for room twenty, didn't you?"

"Yas, that's your room."

"Will you please explain, then, why I find a coffin by the side of the bed, on two chairs?"

"You must be crazy!" the landlord ejaculated.

"Not a bit of it," Dick assured. "There is a coffin there as big as life, and if you don't believe it, just come up and see for yourself."

The landlord made up his mind right away that he wanted to see for himself, so calling a man to take his place for a few minutes, he went with Dick up to the room where the coffin was.

The coffin was still there, and Baldy could but look at it in undisguised astonishment.

"Didn't you ever see it before?" Dick asked.

"Never in my life," the landlord assured.

"Well, this is a go!" Dick exclaimed. "I thought perhaps it was one you had about the house somewhere, and it had been put in here for a joke."

"Never had sich a thing about ther house," was the assurance. "I don't know what ter make of et."

"Neither do I. Is there anybody in the town who makes coffins?"

"Not ter my knowledge ther ain't."

"How do you bury your dead?"

"We jest roll 'em in a blanket, unless it happens ter be a prominent citizen, when we sets ter work and makes him a box. We can't do no sich job as this hyer, however. I'm stuck."

"Well, don't say anything about it for the present, and we'll see what comes of it."

"All right; jest as you say; but, I'd like ter know ther meanin' of et, and ef you kin find out I want yer to tell me. I won't have sich business goin' on in my house ef I know et."

"Good enough; I'll post you if I learn anything that can interest you. Here, let's shove the thing under the bed."

"And ain't yer afraid ter sleep in ther room with et?" Baldy asked.

Dick laughed. "Afraid of a coffin!" he cried.

"It might be a sign of bad luck, ye know."

"Which it will be, when I find out who put it here, you bet!"

The landlord helped him to put the coffin under the bed, and then went out, and Dick was again alone.

Locking the door, and making sure that all was in order about the room, he resumed his chair and lighted a cigar.

His thoughts were busy enough, as he sent rings of smoke curling upward. Was he to believe that the landlord knew nothing about the coffin? If so, by what manner of means had it come into that room? How had it been carried into the house? How had it been produced in so short a time, if it had been brought there especially for his benefit?

Puzzling questions, all of them, and no satisfying answers were forthcoming to any of them.

"See here," Dick suddenly said to himself, rousing up, for he was growing sleepy; "there may be danger in this room for me to-night. I must be prepared for it. I have had experience with rooms that had secret doors. I am going to sleep like a brick, when I once drop off, and it won't pay for me to get caught."

He sprung up and took a turn or two around the room.

His mind was busy the while, trying to invent some means of protection.

For a time he considered one thing and another, such as tacks on the floor for the feet of any one who might come; or a string around the bed, on chairs, to signal the approach of any person, but finally he came down to another and more simple plan.

He decided to make a bunk on the floor, at the foot of the bed, putting a row of chairs in front of it so that no one could approach without moving them.

"That will answer well enough," he decided. "If any one means to take me foul in the night, he will expect to find me in bed, and I'll have one more chance to meet him on even footing."

He did not arrange anything until he had put out his light, however, for he knew that with a light in the room his plans could be discovered if any one were watching.

Finally, when he was ready to go to sleep, he put out the light, and having taken careful note of everything about the room before doing so, proceeded at once to arrange his bed as planned.

In a little time the work was done, and laying off only his hat and coat, he got in, pulled the chairs in line, and lay down.

When he laid his head on the pillow he heard some one talking, and raised himself up on his elbow to listen.

The sound was gone immediately, and thinking that it might have been some one shouting in the bar-room, he lay down.

But the moment his head touched the pillow he heard the voice again.

Once more he raised up quickly, and as quickly it ceased.

"Well, what is the meaning of this?" he asked himself. "What voice is that, and where does it come from?"

He listened, but did not hear it, so he lay down again, determined to give the matter no further attention. It could not concern him, anyhow, he reasoned.

When his ear came in contact with the pillow, however, there was the voice, and it sounded so distinctly that Dick fancied he could almost catch some of the words that were spoken.

Suddenly, as he listened, an explanation of it all came to his mind.

The voice must come from the room below, he reasoned, and by laying his head close to the floor he could hear it, but not otherwise.

That being so, he would be enabled to hear all the more clearly if he were to put his ear to the bare floor, discarding the pillow altogether, thus having nothing between.

No sooner thought of than put into practice.

Rolling off the bunk with head and shoulders, he laid his ear against the floor.

Immediately the talking seemed to grow louder, though in reality the tones were low, and he

caught every word as plainly as though the persons had been in that very room.

"And you are positively certain that this man is Deadwood Dick the detective, are you?" were the words that he heard uttered.

"Eureka!" Dick exclaimed.

Hearing his own name mentioned, awakened every faculty, and he was full of interest and resolve to hear all he could.

"Of course I am," was the answer.

"Then you must have some means of knowing positively. Just tell me what they are, if you will."

"Well, they are simple. Deadwood Dick's name is Richard M. Bristol, and such is the name this man has registered here. Then, if that were not enough, this Deadwood Dick is a holy terror at fighting. You saw how he laid out High-hoss Noah."

"Well, two good points, I admit, but not proof positive. Still, proof enough to warrant your deductions. He must be made to get out of here, by some means or other."

"Exactly, and that's what he has been warned to do. If he don't heed the warning, then force will have to be used."

There was then a pause.

Dick was trying hard to recognize their voices, but failed to do so.

"So I am not wanted here," he thought. "I have heard that, before. But, my fine fellows, that is a sure sign that I am wanted here the worst way. We'll see how this business will come out."

"But, what plan will we use, if he don't go?" one of the speakers asked after a moment.

"That is something that will have to be planned," responded the other. "It cannot be arranged at a moment's notice."

"No, I should imagine not," thought Dick, and he smiled grimly.

CHAPTER VII.

DICK HINTS A WARNING.

THERE was another pause, then.

Dick kept his ear glued to the floor, listening. He considered himself richly in luck that he had stumbled upon this.

But, then, had he stumbled upon it? When he recalled the coffin and the cause that had led him to bunk on the floor, he looked upon it as more than mere chance.

"There is deep rascality going on here," he told himself, "and their over-carefulness is just what is going to bring them into trouble. It is so in nine cases out of ten, too."

And his guess was about as near the truth as he could have come. Only for their efforts to scare him away, he would now have been in bed and in all probability fast asleep.

Presently the conversation below was resumed.

"I believe they ship bullion again to-morrow," one remarked.

"Have you heard how much?"

"Not in exact figures, but a big sum."

"Do you think it will get through?"

"I doubt it."

"Owing to Captain Death, eh?"

"Yes, owing to Captain Death and band."

"But, I believe Appleby is going to send an armed escort with the stage."

"Yes, so he is, now that old Pil Brooke is here."

"What does he have to say about it?"

"He means to put an end to the business if he can."

"And how does he propose to do it?"

"Well, he is going to raise the reward, and he'll give a special offer to-morrow to any man who will kill the road-agent if he appears."

"Ha! ha! ha! How does he expect to kill a skeleton, I would like to know? I tell you what it is if this Deadwood Dick could not bring him down, with the shot he let go at him, bullets will never harm him."

"It looks that way; but, that's the arrangement, nevertheless. I tell you old Pil Brooke is on the war-path. He has sunk a barrel of money in the Little Joker, and he wants to see some return for it."

"And I don't blame him. But he might as well have remained out East, for all the good he can do here in persons."

"I think you're right. If natives of the soil can't deal with the road-agent, no use his trying."

"And, what is more, if he goes to making himself too numerous around here, he may find himself suddenly out of wind. Captain Death is a man who will stand no foolishness."

"If a man be he. You did not add that. I don't well see how a being that has no flesh on

his shining bones can be called a man any longer."

"I stand corrected. But, say, who is the damsel who came by the stage to-night?"

"I'll never tell you. There is something of a mystery about her."

"In what way? I like mysteries."

"Well, no one has seen her face, that I am aware of, unless it's the landlord's gal."

"Just what I thought, the reason I asked."

"Do you imagine she is anything to old Pilbrooke?"

"Don't see how she can be. Perhaps this Deadwood Dick of yours knows more about her than any one else."

"No, I happen to know that he does not."

"And how do you know that?"

Dick himself was interested to know this.

"Because," came the answer, "I saw Lim look at her name on the register, after Baldy had put it down."

"You are something of a detective, I see. But you have the weakness of taking every indication for proof. Perhaps he only looked to see if the name had been entered correctly."

"No, I don't believe that. Besides, he's too shrewd for that."

"Too shrewd for what?"

"Why, if he knew her, but wanted to play off that he didn't, he would never have been seen looking at her name on the register."

"Now, there you go again, jumping right at a conclusion. Why not look at it the other way, that he did look at the register to give an impression, just the impression you have formed."

"Oh, well, it is too small a point to dwell upon. We won't talk about it any more. Let's get back to the starting-point."

"Very well, just as you please."

But just there they were interrupted, and Deadwood Dick heard nothing more that was of any interest to him.

There was a knock at a door, one of the voices gave an invitation for the person to enter, and some one entered the room, evidently a person who had no share in this kind of talk.

The conversation became general, for a few minutes, and then the trio began playing cards, and during the progress of their game Dick fell asleep.

When he awoke it was daylight.

Springing up, he looked at his watch.

The one Captain Death relieved him of was a common silver affair, one he had provided himself with for just such an emergency; this was his fine gold chronometer.

Finding that it must be about breakfast-time, he set about making ready to go down, and while he was thus engaged the breakfast-bell rung, calling the hungry to come and partake.

Dick was soon ready, and when he had taken up his bunk from the floor, and fixed the bed so as to give the impression that he had slept there, he left the room and went down.

That business of the morning was soon done with, and when he left the table Dick had occasion to return to his room for something he had left there.

While in the room, then, he thought about the coffin, and looked under the bed to see if it were still there.

To his surprise, and yet not to his surprise either, he found it was gone!

When had it been taken? That was a question that came to him then.

Probably while he was at breakfast, but he did not know it to be so. It was just possible that it had been taken away during the night.

Going down again, he sauntered out upon the piazza, lighted a cigar, and sat down.

The town was just beginning to stir itself for the business of another day, but there was not a quarter of the noise of the previous evening.

While there seated, Austin Pilbrooke came out of the bar-room.

"Hello, fellow traveler," he greeted, "are you waiting for the stage to go, to get away from this modern Sodom?"

"You think it's a wicked place, then," laughed Dick.

"The worst place I ever got into in my life!" Pilbrooke cried. "I'm sorry I can't go along with you."

"But I'm not going on," Dick informed. "I'm going to stop over for a day or so myself. I have changed my mind since yesterday."

"It can't be because you like the place, then, I'll be bound! Perhaps it is because you do not want to meet that death's-head highwayman again. I don't much blame you if such is the case."

"You are right in the first instance, anyhow," said Dick. "It is because I don't like

the place that I have made up my mind to stop over. As to the road-agent, I should like nothing better than to meet him again. I want to see what he is made of, since bullets of mine have no effect on him."

"Do you mean that?"

"Of course I do."

"See here, maybe you would like to take a hand in the work of running him to earth."

"I might be induced to take a hand in the game."

"You know, perhaps, that Appleby, the manager of the Little Joker Mine here, has offered a reward of a thousand dollars for his capture."

"Yes, I have seen his posted notice to that effect."

"Well, I'm going to put four thousand more to it and make it five."

"That will be a respectable sum."

"And perhaps you will make a try for it, eh?"

"I'll give you my opinion," said Dick, "and that is, the man who wins the reward will earn it."

"Then you look upon it as a difficult matter to take this ghastly Jack Sheppard, eh?"

"It will be no boy's play, you can bet."

"But, taken he shall be, if I have to raise the reward another five. I am out of pocket a big fortune already at his hands."

"You have an interest in the Little Joker Mine, I believe."

Dick recalled the conversation he had heard on the previous night.

"I should say I have," cried Pilbrooke. "I own half of the shares, but for the past year I haven't had a cent of returns, although the mine is paying big in the output. This band of robbers has gobbled everything."

"Strange your manager here would allow the thing to go on so long."

"Just what I told him last night, and he wanted to know what he could do about it. Said he couldn't hire men to tackle this Captain Death, as he's called."

"You haven't any idea that the manager himself can have a finger in the pie, have you?"

"Oh, no! Appleby is the soul of honor!"

"It was a chance idea that came to me, that was all. Such things have been heard of, you know. No need to speak of it."

"Certainly not, certainly not."

"By the way, I understand considerable bulletion is to be shipped by the stage this morning."

"Ha! how did you learn that?"

"Well, no matter just how. What do you think the chances are for its getting through?"

"I am at loss to understand how you could know this. It was a secret, we believed. But, it is so, and as to its getting through— Well, we are going to make a try for it, anyhow."

"Yes, I understand you intend sending an armed escort. But, Mr. Pilbrooke, take a word of warning from me. You are in danger, in making war in person against this outlaw, and you want to look out for yourself. And, in time of danger, a man has to be as watchful of friends as of foes. It will pay you to be on your guard all the time."

CHAPTER VIII.

DICK PLAYS FOR POINTS.

PILBROOKE looked at Dick keenly; he did not seem to "catch on."

"See here, tell me in plain words just what you mean," he demanded.

"Can't very well use any plainer words than I have," returned Dick. "Keep your eye open for snags ahead."

"Yes, but how came you to know anything about this armed escort? Come, you seem to know as much about this business as I do. And who are these friends your warning is intended to cover?"

"I am not prepared to tell you anything more than I have," Dick evaded. "You may heed my hint or not, just as you please. You ought to know, though, that in coming here to break up this band you put yourself in danger, and you can't tell how or when Captain Death will strike."

"Oh, I see; it is only a warning in a general way against him, then. I see. Much obliged to you of course."

"And you needn't mention that I have said anything about it."

"All right, I won't. Ha! there is Appleby, and I want to see him. I'll talk with you again."

Pilbrooke turned away, then, going off with Appleby in the direction of the mine, and Dick went into the bar-room.

Stepping to the bar, he began to turn over the

pages of the register, as if merely toying with them; but, he had an object in view, as need scarcely be said. He wanted to learn who occupied the room under his own, and having noted the number of it, the register ought to tell him.

And so it did. He found that room was occupied by Gerald Appleby, and he drew the conclusion at once that this was a son of the mine manager.

"It begins to come close to home," he reflected, as he turned away. "There is some mighty crooked work going on here, and I think I'll take a hand in the game on Mr. Pilbrooke's side. I rather like the man, and I think he is being sapped pretty badly."

He turned away from the register, and fell into conversation with Baldy Benson.

"What about that aire coffin?" Baldy asked.

"Nothing about it," answered Dick, "only it is gone."

"Gone, do yer say?" the landlord exclaimed in surprise. "When did et go?"

"I give it up. I thought maybe you would know something about it. But, it is of little importance. I suppose it was taken out while I was at breakfast."

"Wull, I ber durn!" the landlord exclaimed.

"This hyer beats ther nick, et do. I'll have a watch set and see ef I can't find out somethin' about et. I'll have no sich goin's-on in my house, not ef I know et."

After a few further words, Dick turned away, going out again to the piazza.

The stage had just come around from the stables, and was ready to set out again on its tiresome journey.

"Whoop, thar, Polly," the Jehu was saying, "or I'll take a leg offen yer. I won't stand none o' your foolin' ter-day, an' ye wants ter mind et."

Having got his animals quieted to suit him, Ribbon Johnny turned to the hotel and shouted:

"Come, now, pilgrims, ther hearse ar' ready and waitin' fer ye, and we'll be movin' erlong. Tumble right out hyer and bundle in, fer we've got a long trail ahead of us, and no time ter fool away."

All the passengers who were going were ready and waiting, and they lost no time about getting aboard.

Tombstone Dan was among the number. He had had all he wanted of Satan's Spring, and was ready to move along. He made a break for the stage, the first one, and took a place inside.

"Curlin' smoke!" he exclaimed, "but yer don't ketch me on top this time. I paid me fare, I did, and I don't mean to work me passage by holdin' on fer me life. I had enough of that yesterday."

The others followed right on, and in a brief time the stage was about as full as it had been the previous evening, though not with all of the same passengers.

There were four who remained over, and these were Deadwood Dick, Austin Pilbrooke, Hubert Watkins and the young woman, Jessie Worthington.

In a little time the baggage had been strapped on, and the driver climbed to his place and took up the lines.

"Ain't yer goin' on with me?" he suddenly called out to Deadwood Dick, seeing him standing idly in the door.

"No, I'm going to stop over and rest up," was the response.

"But, yer has paid yer fare through."

"No matter, I can finish the ride with you some other trip."

"All right. Hold fast, now, galoots on top. Gee-up, thar, Polly, and stop yer bitin', or I'm a clam ef I don't snatch off yer top-knot! Gee-up!"

The long whip snatched and cracked, the mules bent their backs to the effort, and away went the stage, rolling and rocking as only your Western stage knows how to do with best effect.

And as it went off, a head was thrust out at a window, a head with one of its eyes badly blacked and swollen, and a voice cried:

"Good-by, citizens; and good-by ter you, Mister Chain-lightnin'! Ef that aire High-hoss Noah wants any more of your kind of medicine, give et to him! Give him a good, strong dose, too, while ye're about et!"

This was said to Deadwood Dick, and it brought forth a shout of laughter, in the echoes of which the stage rolled out of the pocket and disappeared in the canyon.

Soon after the departure of the stage, horsemen began to collect at the hotel.

They came from different directions, and there were soon a dozen of them on hand.

Bristol rightly guessed that these were the

men who were to follow the stage, for the purpose of protecting the shipment of bullion.

Pilbrooke and Appleby were soon seen coming from the direction of the mine, and when they reached the piazza, Pilbrooke turned and addressed the horsemen.

"My good men," he spoke, "a reward of five thousand dollars is now offered to the man who will capture this road-agent and deliver him over to the law. And I will give an additional reward of five hundred dollars for every one of his men you can bring back with you, dead or alive. You are expected to protect the stage to its destination, and if it is held up, make sure of your game."

The horsemen gave a shout, declaring that they would do their best.

"And now," added Appleby, "be off. Keep just far enough in the rear of the stage to be out of sight, in the canyon, but not so far that you cannot render prompt help if you are needed."

Another shout, and the horsemen wheeled and dashed off in the direction the stage had taken.

"There," said Pilbrooke, as they disappeared from sight, "if your road-agents can overcome them, I'll give it up."

"I don't know how it will be," responded Appleby, "but you know I have tried the same thing before, and my men got the worst of it. You saw the trouble we had in getting the men to undertake it."

The Detective Prince, much as he wished to take a hand in the matter, decided that the time for him to act had not yet come. He believed that a little delay would put him in possession of some facts that he had not so far got hold of. There was some deep game being played in this town of Satan's Spring, he was fully persuaded.

After the setting out of the horsemen, Appleby and Pilbrooke returned to the mine office.

The crowd melted away, in a little time, and the Plaza looked deserted. There were only a few persons about the hotel, and included with these were Deadwood Dick and Hubert Watkyns.

The latter drew a chair up near to Dick's, sat down, and observed:

"So, you stopped over too, eh?"

"Yes," Dick made answer. "Thought I'd spend a day or so here."

"With business in view, I presume? Don't know of anything else that would keep a man here."

"No, just for the fun of it," Dick corrected. "From what you say, though, I readily infer that you are here on business."

"Well, er—yes, on business, of course. By the way, I notice that our lady passenger of yesterday did not go on this morning. Presume she is a stranger to you as she is to everybody else?"

"Entirely so," Dick assured. "But, by the way, Mr. Watkyns, do you mind telling me where we have met before? You have the advantage of me to a certain extent, I believe."

"And in what way, allow me to ask?"

"Did you not just address me as Deadwood Dick?"

Dick was playing for points. He had been studying the man's voice while he was talking, and believed he recognized it as one of the voices he had heard in the room under his on the previous evening.

Watkyns looked at him in surprise that was undisguised. And Dick could see that he was studying hard to come at an immediate solution of some knotty problem that had presented itself to his mind.

Dick had a two-fold object in view. First, he wanted to find out if his surmise was correct, that Watkyns was one of the men he had heard talking; and next, if he was, he wanted to let him know positively that he was Deadwood Dick. This information, coming direct from him, would lead them to show their hand, he thought.

"I—I think you must be mistaken, sir," Watkyns denied. "I certainly did not utter that name. In truth, I do not remember ever to have heard it before."

"It is very strange, then," said Dick, "I was sure the name fell from your lips. But, it is of small matter. We will let it drop."

And now Dick was about sure that the name had come from Watkyns's lips, that is, on the previous evening; the man's manner now seemed to prove it.

"It certainly is strange," Watkyns agreed. "If I did speak the name, it was without knowing it, and that seems impossible. Why, are you known by that name, Mr. Bristol?"

"Yes, I am familiarly called Deadwood Dick."

There was no mistaking the light of exulta-

tion that flashed in Watkyns's eyes and burned there for a second.

They talked on, but Dick held to a general conversation, giving out nothing and by the same token, gaining but little of importance from his man.

Half an hour, or maybe a little longer, was passed in this manner, when their attention was suddenly drawn to some horsemen who were coming into the gulch at a run. They came from the direction in which the stage had set out, and a second glance proved them to be the men who had followed to protect the shipment of bullion.

CHAPTER IX.

DICK SPEAKS OUT.

"WHAT means this?" cried Watkyns.

"It looks like hasty retreat," Dick suggested.

"Can it be that they have already met the road-agents?"

"It looks that way, and if I am any judge, they have got badly worsted."

The horsemen came on, and as they drew near it was seen that there were only ten of them.

There had been twelve at the setting out. Did it signify that two of their number had met their fate at the hands of the agents?

By the time the horsemen reached the hotel, there was quite a little knot of men there to receive them, and others were hastening to the spot from every direction.

"What is ther trouble, Bakers?" called out the landlord.

Bakers was the name of the man who was at the head of the little company.

"Trouble enough," he grated, as he drew his horse to a stop. "Whar's old Appleby?" he demanded, in the same breath.

"He's over at ther mine," he was told.

"No," said Baldy Benson, "thar he comes, now."

Appleby was coming, in haste, and Pilbrooke was at his heels.

"What's the matter—what's the matter?" the mine manager cried out, as he came puffing up.

"We got ther wu'st of et, that's all," Bakers explained.

"What!" cried Pilbrooke, "you met the robbers so soon!"

"Yas, jest so soon," was the assurance, "and two good men hev bit ther dust."

"Where did you meet them?" asked Appleby.

"Jest this side of Big Bow Bend."

"As close by as that?"

"You bet."

"And did they get away with the gold?"

"We opine they did. We didn't git fur enough ahead ter find out."

"Tell us all about it," the manager ordered.

"This is worse than I looked for," he added, aside to Pilbrooke.

"I should say so," Pilbrooke agreed. "I had no idea of defeat, with such a force. This is a serious matter, and the governor has got to take action in it."

"Yer see," Bakers proceeded, "we was ridin' along, with our ears open' fer a call from ther stage at any minnit, when of a sudden we found our way blockel by four men with rifles at their shoulders. They had ther drop on us in ther wu'st kind of way, and thar we was. Couldn't do a thing. Two of ther boyees did reach fer their guns, but bless ye they was out of their saddles dead afore they had 'em out of their belts. We was ordered ter put up our hands, which we did, and then they turned us face about and started us fer home."

"You are a pack of miserable cowards!" cried Pilbrooke, hotly. "Why didn't you ride right over the dogs?"

"You don't understand, Pilbrooke," said Appleby. "The 'drop' means everything, in a case of this sort, and our men had no show."

"And here's another shipment of gold that robber has gathered in, eh? I won't stand it! I came out here to put this thing to a stop, and I'm going to do it! Ten thousand dollars for the capture of this Captain Death, dead or alive!"

"Fifty thousand won't bring him any sooner than five," said Appleby. "He has got our men afraid of him, and is bound to carry things his own way."

"He is, is he! I'll show him! I'll have out the troops, but what this nest of vipers shall be broken up and wiped out! I didn't sink a quarter of a million of dollars in this mine to be robbed of my returns. Ten thousand dollars, men of Satan's Spring, for the capture of this outlaw!"

It was a big offer, but all who heard it,

nearly, shook their heads, as if to signify that they had no desire to attempt earning it.

Deadwood Dick was a quiet looker-on, smoking away with apparent unconcern.

In fact, though, he was studyihg the matter, and paying close attention to everything that was being said.

He had an idea in mind that he felt sure was not far from the truth, and he was resolved to put it to the test, when the time was ripe.

For the present he wanted to let matters go on as they were. He wanted the others to show their hands a little further, so that he might be sure of his ground.

Some further talk with the horsemen was had, when Appleby dismissed them, and some of them rode back into the canyon for the purpose of bringing in the bodies of their dead companions.

When they returned there was another man with them—the one who had gone with the stage in charge of the bullion.

His story was called for with eager demand.

"Et ar' short and sweet, but right to the p'int," he prefaced it. "We war spinnin' right erlong, when of a mighty sudden, right at Big Bow, we got ther order ter elevate our flippers. We h'isted, you bet. Et ar' half dark thar, ye know, and in ther shadders stood Captain Death, with his grinnin' jaws and gleamin' ribs, and he had a six full in both hands. He warned us that it would be sure death ter try ter draw a lead distributor on him, and then told us ter ante out the box o' bullion, double soon, and we anted. There was no help fer et, ye see. Et war that or die, and none of us felt ready ter pass in our chips jest yet."

"And did he hold you up all alone?" inquired Appleby.

"Yas, all alone. Nary other galoot with him."

"And you put out that box of bullion to him without any show of resisting!"

"Bet yer life. We was called, and we kem down. Wasn't no help fer et, not even a little bit."

"Well, what did he do then?"

"Why, soon's we had fired out ther box o' bullion, he told us ter go on. He had us kivered, ye see, all ther time, and we obeyed as meek as leetle lambs."

"And didn't you call for the men who were behind you?" asked Mr. Pilbrooke.

"Never once thought about 'em," was the answer.

Pilbrooke looked the disgust he felt.

"A brave transaction, all the way through," he commented.

"Ef I have heard right," retorted the messenger, "you passed out your wealth to ther agents last night without much of a kick."

Pilbrooke remembered that with chagrin, and had no more to say.

"And so you got out and came back, eh?" observed Appleby.

"Jest as you see, sir. Had nothin' ter take me on, after ther boodle war gone, so when we'd gone on a leetle ways I got out and hoofed it this way."

"Well, lost again," cried Appleby, with a sigh as of resignation to the fate. "I don't see what we are going to do about it, Pilbrooke."

"You don't, eh?" cried that irate gentleman. "I'll have to show you, then. I am going to send a call to the governor for help to rid the country of this outlaw band."

"That seems to be about the only thing that can be done," Appleby agreed.

"Yes, and it ought to have been done long ago, too."

Pilbrooke was thoroughly angered, now, and raked the deck with his biggest guns, so to say.

Appleby felt the force of the shot, too, and turned abruptly and went off in the direction of the office, a dark look on his face.

Pilbrooke looked after him, but did not follow. Instead, he began to pace the piazza, keeping it up till the crowd had gone away, when he dropped into a chair near Deadwood Dick.

"What do you think about this whole proceeding?" he demanded, bluntly.

"I begin to think that I would like to have a quiet talk with you," was the low-toned response.

Pilbrooke looked at him quickly, wondering what he meant.

And that was the question he put.

"I mean just what I said," Dick assured. "I want to have a little talk with you."

"Well, then, fire right ahead and have it," was the invitation.

"Draw your chair just a little nearer, and I will," said Dick.

Pilbrooke did so, and Dick went on.

"You are being swindled here, Mr. Pilbrooke," he said, "and not only that, but your life is in danger."

"How do you know that, sir?"

"In the same way that I know some other things. By close observation, in one direction, and by some things I have heard, in another."

"I do not understand you, sir."

"Well, then, I'll talk so that you can. Is there nothing peculiar about this robbery that has just been done?"

"It was a mighty bold piece of business, that is sure. I never heard of anything like it in my life. Why, it was done right under our noses."

"Exactly. But, that is not all. Whoever that road-agent is, he has helpers right here in this town."

"And how do you know that?"

"By adding two and two; or, in other words, by drawing deductions from simple facts. Captain Death met the stage alone, and ordered the messenger to put out the box of bullion. At the same time his men were further back on the trail, at a point where the stage had already passed, ready to receive and hold back the escort."

"Well, and what does that signify?"

"Everything. It proves that Captain Death knew all about your plans for this business, and laid his own plans accordingly."

"By Mars! but you are right!"

"Of course I am. It shows for itself. The question is, who is the person here who posts him? Or, if this Captain Death himself has been here all the time, who is he?"

"Then you put no stock in his being a ghost?"

"Nonsense! It is a clever disguise, and nothing more. All the ghosts I have ever had any dealings with have turned out to be flesh and blood ghosts."

"Well, if that was the case, what would you advise me to do?"

"In the first place, you want to look out for your life. That is in danger. These fellows will not let you break up their rich source of revenue without a desperate struggle."

"Would they dare attempt my life, do you think?"

"Yes, and with as little thought as they would blow out a candle. You are away out here, and right in their power. I tell you you must have your eyes open night and day."

"Oh, I am inclined to think you take too serious a view of it, sir."

"Very well, think so if you will. I heard a certain party say last night, however, that if you made yourself too numerous—his word—around here, you might find yourself suddenly out of breath."

"You don't say so!" Mr. Pilbrooke gasped, and he looked at Dick in greatest alarm. "Who was it said that? Come, you ought to tell me all about this, so that I can be on my guard."

"So I will," Dick promised; and then followed a long and earnest talk.

CHAPTER X.

DICK DEFINITELY WARNED.

DEADWOOD DICK told his suspicions out in full; and they were both a surprise and a revelation to the confiding stockholder.

But Dick pledged him to silence, and made him understand that he must not let his actions betray his thoughts.

"We have shrewd and cunning rascals to deal with," he warned, "and it will require our best efforts to unmask them, even if they don't get in a cold deal on us and dispose of us."

"Heaven forbid that it should come to that," Mr. Pilbrooke almost gasped. "I had no idea of anything of this sort, or I assure you I would never have ventured out here. But, sir, it does not seem possible! I can't believe it!"

"Very well, hold to your doubts, but don't express them. Just keep your eyes and ears open, and your mouth closed, and give me a little time. Remember what you have promised, and that everything depends on how we go to work, if we are permitted to go to work at all."

He impressed it upon the gentleman as strongly as he could that it was in all probability a matter of life and death, and when they finally parted, Mr. Pilbrooke was in no easy frame of mind.

The day passed without further incident worthy of remark.

Deadwood Dick went around the town a little, taking in the sights, and with an eye open for any clew that might turn up.

The afternoon stage came about on time, not

Ribbon Johnny's "hearse," but another on the same line, and it had come through without seeing the road-agents.

There were several passengers aboard, and among others was a young and quite good-looking young lady, who was traveling alone, or seemed to be, and who made all haste to escape the gaze of the crowd.

She entered the hotel, and for the time being, that was the last that was seen of her.

Later on, Dick took a look at the register, to learn the name of the new arrivals, and among others was that of the lady—"Rose Denmore."

Dick was pacing around the bar-room, to kill time while he waited for the supper-bell when a man of all work about the house stepped up to him and said:

"Lady wants to see you in the parlor, sir."

"Wants to see me?" Dick questioned. "Are you sure I'm the person?"

"She said Mr. Bristol, sir."

"Well, I answer to that name," remarked Dick, "so I'll go."

He stepped out of the bar-room, across the hall, and entered the parlor.

As he entered the room, a lady rose to greet him, and he recognized her at once by her attire as the mysterious passenger of the previous day.

She was good-looking to a degree, but pale, and her face had an expression of trouble stamped upon it.

"You desire to see me?" Dick interrogated, bowing.

"Yes," was the assurance, in a pleasant voice. "I have a word of warning for you, Mr. Bristol."

Dick's mind flew instantly to the note he had received on the previous evening.

He smiled, saying:

"Then this will be the second time you have warned me."

She looked at him in surprise.

"I do not understand you, sir," she said.

"Did you not leave a note for me at the bar last night?"

"Most assuredly not, sir. What leads you to suppose I did?"

Dick explained, briefly. He had jumped at a conclusion too quickly, as he admitted.

"No, I know nothing whatever about that matter," the woman declared. "What I would warn you about now, however, is something that must have bearing upon the same grounds."

"Well, enlighten me," Dick urged.

"I will do so. This night you are going to be drugged, at the bar I suppose, if it can be done, and you will probably never see the light of another day."

Dick smiled again, this time in his grim way.

"That is news, anyhow," he remarked. "I will be on the lookout for anything of that sort. But, tell me how you came to know anything about this. I am interested, as is but natural under the circumstances."

"I heard it planned this afternoon. You have enemies in this town, enemies who mean to remove you from their path."

"Can you tell me who they are?"

"Unfortunately, I can not. I did not see them, nor did I hear their names spoken."

"Well, I am greatly obliged to you for the warning. If I can render you any service in return—"

"And you can, sir. By what I overheard, I learned that you are Deadwood Dick, the famous detective. I will see you to-morrow and tell you all about what I require; that is, if you will help me."

"There is nothing famous about me," Dick modestly disowned, "but my help is already pledged to you, so you have only to direct me, provided these enterprising enemies of mine do not put out my candle before the morrow."

"And you must take care they do not. Forewarned is forearmed, you are aware, and you must be on your guard."

"I shall try to be, rest assured. But, what is the nature of the favor you desire?"

"Well, I can tell you that much. You saw that young and pretty girl who came by the stage? She is in danger, and in such a danger as only I can rescue her from. I dare not trust to my own strength, however, now that I know I can depend on you, and so I have come to you for help."

"And you shall have it if I am alive and free," Dick freely promised once more.

Just then the bell rung for supper, and the woman rose, putting on a vail as she did so.

"I will keep you no longer," she said. "Let nothing be said concerning the interview we have had."

"Of course not," said Dick.

With a bow, then, he turned to leave the

room, the woman making haste to go out by another door in the rear.

Dick went at once to the supper-room, his mind filled with what he had just heard respecting the young lady who had come by the stage.

Who was she? What danger threatened her? Who was this woman who was the only person who could rescue her? Questions that puzzled him, and that gave him much food for reflection.

His mind thus filled, he forgot for the time being the warning he had received.

He thought no more about it till, the meal finished, he returned to the bar-room, when it suddenly entered his mind again.

This was, no doubt, owing to the fact that the woman had spoken of the bar in connection with the warning she had given. Anyhow, the fact was the same.

But, having thought of it, he was on his guard, and was waiting to see who it would be who would invite him to drink. He took a seat near a table in the back part of the room, and lighted a cigar.

He had not been there long when Austin Pilbrooke came up and took a seat on the other side of the table.

"You are taking things easy, I see," he observed, cheerfully.

"As well that way as any other," Dick responded.

They fell to talking, and while they sat there Mr. Appleby and his son came into the room.

Appleby senior looked around, and seeing Pilbrooke, led the way over to where he and Dick were talking.

They joined in, taking seats, and presently, as Dick was about to provide himself with a fresh cigar, he passed his case around to the others.

All accepted his offer, and Pilbrooke said:

"I suppose none of you will object to my ordering some wine, eh?"

Without waiting to find whether there would be any objections or not, he got up and stepped to the bar with the order.

Deadwood Dick hardly knew what to think.

Was it possible that he had been mistaken in Pilbrooke? Could he have made so great a blunder? Was it he who was about to administer a drug to him, if he could?

No, he could not believe it. But, the warning was ringing in his mind, and he could not have dismissed it, even had he desired to do so. And that, naturally, was not to be thought of.

In a few moments Pilbrooke was back, and presently the wine was brought to the table.

The glasses were placed, and Pilbrooke proceeded to open the bottle.

"You will have to excuse me," remarked Dick, as he pushed his glass away. "I do not feel like indulging this evening. Accept my thanks just the same, however."

"What, won't you try a little?" asked Pilbrooke.

"No, not to-night."

"You had better take a little, it will make you sleep well."

"No, not any this evening, thank you."

Having declined once, Dick would not change his mind, and he was not pressed further.

But now he no longer had a shadow of suspicion toward Mr. Pilbrooke. He intended partaking of the wine himself, and had it been a scheme to drug Dick, would he have said a word about its making him sleep well?

No, Dick was satisfied that Mr. Pilbrooke had nothing whatever to do with the plot that had been hatched against him.

"Who, then, had? That remained to be seen. There would no doubt be further developments.

But, since he would not drink, would not that rather upset their plan?

Mr. Pilbrooke and the two Applebys filled their glasses, and proceeded to sip the wine leisurely.

Dick watched them narrowly, without letting them suspect he was doing so, but he discovered nothing. They all took the wine, with no shamming, and presently their glasses were emptied and refilled.

They talked pleasantly, all around, and half an hour soon sped away.

At the end of that time Deadwood Dick began to feel terribly sleepy. He was almost unable to keep awake.

"You'll have to excuse me, gentlemen," he said, getting up. "I believe I have smoked one cigar too many. I must go out and take a turn in the air."

"And I'm with you," declared Mr. Pilbrooke.

"Never felt so unmercifully sleepy in my life. Shall have to say good-night, Appleby. I won't be long out of bed, I can tell you."

CHAPTER XI.

FACING GRIM DEATH.

DEADWOOD DICK felt alarm. Was it possible he had been drugged, already?

If he had, how and when had it been done? He was at loss to know.

He might have disbelieved the suspicion, but when Mr. Pilbrooke acknowledged feeling so sleepy, it impressed him.

He made a break for the piazza, where he took several turns up and down, trying to fight the drowsiness off, but all to no purpose.

Pilbrooke had followed him out, and going up to him, Dick said:

"Mr. Pilbrooke, we have been drugged! You must keep awake at all hazards, or it may cost your life!"

That gentleman turned pale to the lips.

"I can't do it," he declared. "I'm ready to drop."

"You must do it!" Dick impressed. "Come with me to my room, and I'll give you something I'm going to take myself."

Dick started in haste, for he knew that time was precious. The drug, and there was no doubt in it now, was working, and he knew it would be a hard fight to stay its power, even if it could be done at all.

And it had come to his mind, too, when and where the drug had been given. It must have been put in his cup of tea, at supper. There was no other possible chance, he knew. And that being so, his enemies must have an agent in the house.

Pilbrooke followed right behind him, but on reaching the upper hall he stumbled and fell, and after only one effort to get up, rolled over upon his back, fast asleep.

Dick heard his fall, and glancing back, realized what it meant.

He made all the more haste on his own account.

Opening the door of his room, he dashed in, striking a match as he went and looking for the candle.

No candle was there, but something else, and something of a most significant nature met his startled gaze.

There on the floor lay the coffin again, open, and with a card in it the same as before. But now, under the name was a date of death, and that date was the date of that very day!

Weakened and unnerved as he was by the drug, Deadwood Dick felt a thrill of horror. He made a desperate effort to rally, but in vain. The drug was rapidly and surely stealing power over him, and he realized that he must succumb.

He sought another match, as the first one went out, but could not find one. He groped forward in the dark, intent upon reaching his valise, but, in doing so he stumbled and fell. He tried to rise, but fell again. Another effort he made, and then another and final one, when, overcome, he sunk down senseless.

When he awoke, Dick found himself amid strange surroundings.

His head was humming and buzzing, and it was some moments before he could fully take in the situation.

Gradually, though, he recovered himself, and was able to use his thoughts and reasoning powers once again, and he put them to use.

He seemed to be in a grotto, or cavern. Such he soon decided it was. A torch in a niche in the rocky wall on his right lighted the place. There seemed to be no one there besides himself.

Next, he realized that he was confined in some narrow object, he knew not what it could be. It seemed to hold him closely on all sides, and he had no use of his arms or legs. Suddenly his mind reverted to the coffin he had seen in his room, and then the whole matter came to mind.

He must be in that coffin now, and it standing on end, resting on the floor and leaning back against the wall of this cavern in which he found himself. Even so it was, and he had rightly guessed.

Having learned so much, and all his faculties now on the alert, Dick set about learning more.

The top part of the coffin was open, so he had free use of his eyes, the little good that might do him. The lower half was tightly closed, and, as said, he had no use of his limbs.

He looked around the place in which he found himself; it appeared to be of considerable size.

Opposite to him was an opening in the wall, leading off somewhere, as he ventured to guess.

The sound of running water was heard, too, seeming to come from a point on the prisoner's left, and further down.

Craning his neck, Dick looked out of his narrow prison, to learn more.

And as he did so he was startled.

Almost at his feet, or at the foot of the coffin, as it stood on end, was a dark, hungry-looking chasm.

A slight jar, he feared, might send the coffin toppling over and down into that unknown and terrible death.

He was careful not to move.

The sound of the water came from this dark chasm, proving that there was a river, or mountain stream, flowing at its bottom.

Looking the other way, another surprise awaited him.

There on the rocky floor, only a little distance off, lay Austin Pilbrooke.

He was bound securely, and was still unconscious.

"A curse upon the rascals!" Dick muttered. "They have downed us, and, as it looks now, we are downed for good. Richard, my boy, I guess you have come to the end of your rope, at last."

The sound of steps warned him that some one was coming.

Nearer they drew, and presently a man emerged from the opening opposite to where Dick stood.

He was armed, and wore a half-mask over his face.

Casting a look at Pilbrooke, he crossed the floor of the cavern and peered into the coffin at Dick.

"Hello!" he exclaimed, as his eyes met the piercing eyes of the prisoner, "ye hev waked up, hev ye?"

"I guess I have," Dick responded.

"Et looks so."

"Have you any objection to telling me where I am, and what is the meaning of all this?" Dick asked.

"Not in ther least," was the answer. "You is in ther hands of Captain Death, and this hyer ar' his chamber of execution, as you'll soon see."

"What is going to be done with me?"

"I opine you'll be shot."

"And what for?"

"Mebby ther captain will tell ye that, when he comes."

"And when is he coming? You'll excuse my question, but, as I am interested I want to know."

"Wull, you is a cool one, durn me if ye ain't!" the fellow exclaimed. "Ther captain ar' comin' soon's I call him, and I'm goin' ter call him now."

"And where is he? How is it that he is not here to entertain his guests? I feel slighted."

The fellow laughed.

"You takes ther rag, you does, fer narve," he cried. "But, we'll take some of that out of yer, I opine. Ther captain is in another part of ther cavern, but he wull soon be byer."

The man turned away, then, and walked back to the opening, where he drew a revolver from his belt and fired a shot.

This done, he replaced the weapon, and came back.

"That wull soon fetch him," he remarked.

The tramp of feet was soon heard, and in a little time Captain Death stalked into the chamber, followed by four masked men bearing rifles.

The ghastly road-agent looked more horrible than ever, if possible. His grinning jaws and fleshless ribs gleamed horribly white in the dull light, as he stopped just within the opening.

He was clad as on the other occasion when Dick had seen him. His black cloak fell from his shoulders, open and disclosing his gleaming bones in front, while on his head was the broad, black hat, adding to his hideousness, if possible.

"Halt!" he commanded, when the masked men had filed past him.

They came to an immediate stop, drawing up in line and facing the coffin.

When that was done, and they stood with their rifles at rest, the skeleton highwayman addressed Dick.

"Deadwood Dick," he spoke, "the hour of your death is at hand. Soon you will be as I am, a being to whom death has terrors no more."

"Is that so?" returned Dick, coolly.

"It is so, as you will find."

"And, what is the reason for this, if I may be allowed to inquire?"

"There is no need for you to ask that question. You are known, Dick Bristol, and we know what your presence at Satan's Spring signified."

"You don't enlighten me very much," Dick still parleyed.

"I will enlighten you more, then," came the rejoinder. "You took it into your head to hunt down Captain Death and his men, and we have taken it into our hands to put you out of the way."

"Then you do mean to kill me, eh?"

"As surely as you live now."

Deadwood Dick believed it. He saw that he had fallen into the hands of men who could kill without mercy, but, man of nerve that he was, he would not let the rascals see a sign of fear in him now. If there was no escape, let the worst come.

"Very well," he said, "so be it. A man can die but once. Go on with my funeral."

"Is there nothing you want to say?" Captain Death asked.

"There is much I would like to arrange," answered the detective, "but you would not grant me the time, nor would I put my affairs into your hands."

"How much time would you want?"

"Time enough to write a score of letters, and to arrange my affairs."

"Oh, that is asking too much. You can attend to all that in the next world, where time stands still."

"Very well, I ask no favor. Bear in mind, though, that, if by any chance I escape with my life from your power, I will hunt you down."

"Ha! ha! ha! Not the least doubt about it. But, you will not escape. In less than two minutes four bullets will have found your heart. Men, are you ready?"

"We are ready," responded the four.

"Take steady aim at his heart, then, or at the spot on the coffin beneath which his heart ought to be, and when I say three, fire."

Up came the four rifles, as one, and Deadwood Dick saw their glinting barrels brought to bear upon his breast. It was a moment of the most awful suspense he had ever experienced.

"One," Captain Death counted; "two," after a second's pause; and then the fatal word—"three!"

CHAPTER XII.

THROUGH THE JAWS OF DEATH.

THE four rifles spoke as one. Fire and lead belched forth from each; but at the same instant an unlooked-for thing happened. The coffin fell over sideways, and plunged headlong into the chasm.

Captain Death and his men looked after it in amazement, and stood spellbound as they heard it go crashing down into the depths.

Twice they heard it strike the rocks, then followed a splash, when it struck the water. After that all was still.

"The shock of the bullets striking it must have caused it to fall," Captain Death commented. "Well, no matter; it will save us the trouble of disposing of the body."

"Et wasn't that way, though," one of the riflemen spoke up.

"Not that way! How was it, then?"

"Ther coffin went over jest afore we fired."

"Are you sure about that?"

The other three admitted that it was so.

Captain Death sprung across the chamber and looked at the wall.

Sure enough! There on the rock, in a space of two inches, were the four bullets flattened on the stone.

"You are right," he cried. "Not a bullet touched him."

"But et don't make no difference, I opine," observed the fellow who had been Dick's guard. "He's gone down to his death now, just as sure as the bullets could have sent him."

"Oh, yes, there is no doubt about that," agreed the captain. "It is strange how the coffin came to fall, though."

The coffin was gone, and Deadwood Dick with it, and there being nothing to be done about it but to accept the fact and make the most of it, Captain Death and his men turned to their other prisoner.

Mr. Pilbrooke was just coming to his senses.

The reports of the rifles, no doubt, had had something to do with waking him out of his unnatural sleep.

"Well, how do you find yourself?" Captain Death demanded, giving him a poke with his foot, to stir him up.

"W—where am I?" the unhappy man asked.

"You are in the hands of your friends, Captain Death and his men," was the answer.

This statement, and a sight of the terrible-looking chief of the band, had the effect to bring Pilbrooke to with a rush.

He struggled to a sitting posture, and looked around him, terrified.

"Why have you brought me here?" he asked.

"To kill you," was the answer, right to the point.

"Heavens!"

Beads of perspiration started out upon the prisoner's forehead, showing the great fear he experienced.

"That is just the size of it," Captain Death assured. "You have five minutes to settle up your earthly matters, and then off you go."

"But, you—you will not kill me! You must not—you dare not!"

Captain Death laughed.

"We have just killed a better man than you," he informed.

"You have just killed a man!" he gasped. "Who was he?"

"Your friend, Deadwood Dick."

"My God! You don't mean it!"

"Oh, but it's so. We stood him up and shot him, and now he's lending himself as food for fishes down there in the underground river."

"Oh! this is horrible, horrible! You must not kill me, men, you must not. *You must not*. I have a family East who will look for my return, and— But, you do not mean it, you can not mean it!"

"You will find out that we do," was the grim assurance. "Come, you are wasting your time. If you have a prayer to offer, you had better be getting at it."

"Oh! this is horrible—horrible! Would you shoot me down like a dog?"

"No, we'll shoot you like a man."

"Oh! spare me, spare me! Spare me for the sake of the loved ones at home who will be expecting my return! I am not ready to die, I can't die yet."

"But you will have to, just the same."

"And why must I die?"

"Because you are against us."

"I'll not oppose you any more, if you will let me go."

"You lie."

"No, no, I swear it!"

"Too thin, governor, and we can't believe it. You have offered ten thousand dollars for our capture, and have threatened to bring the soldiers against us, so we think it is about time we got rid of you."

"But I will take all that back. Spare my life, and I will get away from here in all haste, and never return."

"Oh, that is a poor promise, that is. Once let you off, and let you get back to a place of safety, and you would forget all about it. We'll make sure of you while we have got you."

Mr. Pilbrooke's terror was now pitiable.

Never had he been in a position to compare with this.

"Let me go," he begged, "and I will give you my fortune. All I ask is my life. I will give you everything else I possess."

"And how much are you worth?"

"A good million and a half."

"Captain Death, thet aire 'mount ar' quite a sum," one of the four riflemen ventured.

"You are right in saying that," the captain agreed, "but it is beyond our reach. We could never get it."

"Yes you can, yes you can," Mr. Pilbrooke assured. "I will fix it in any way you suggest. All I ask is my life, and to gain that I will surrender everything else. Only let me live to return to my family."

"What do you say, men?" Captain Death asked.

"If we kin make a fat stake out of him," spoke up one, "I say let him off. I bet he'll never come hyer again."

"You are right, I never will," declared Pilbrooke.

"How much of this wealth can you command at short notice, in solid cash?" the captain asked.

"A quarter of a million, anyhow," was the reply.

"And shall we hold him for that, men?"

"Et won't do no harm ter try et," suggested one.

"And ef et don't come ter time, then we kin kill him anyhow," another added.

"Well," Captain Death decided, "for the present you are spared. We will think the matter over, and if we think favorably of it we'll let you know."

"The money shall be yours, every cent of it, just as soon as it can be had," Pilbrooke eagerly assured. "Only let me off with my life, and that is all I ask. I'll never show myself here again, that you may be sure of."

"We will think it over," the captain repeated, as he drew away. "You will be held here, under guard, for the present."

With that he turned and went out of the chamber, motioning the four men with rifles to follow.

Pilbrooke sunk back on the floor almost exhausted, and the guard resumed his post.

But what of Deadwood Dick?

Was he col in death? or had he escaped?

When the rifles pointed at him, he gave up all hope; he believed that his last minute on earth was at hand, and shut his eyes.

Then began the count.

"Two," he heard, and with the word came a thought.

There was not a second to lose, and the thought was followed by instant action.

He remembered the chasm that yawned at his feet, and the fear he had had, on seeing it, that the coffin might fall over into it.

Now that very fate was welcomed! To remain there a second longer, meant certain death. A fall into the fissure might mean death none the less certain.

On the one hand was absolute certainty; on the other was the hope that, by miraculous chance, there might be an escape. That chance he welcomed, and acted.

With the thought, he threw his weight suddenly to the left, and over toppled the coffin, just as the rifles cracked.

The coffin struck the edge of the abyss, then bounded off into space, and he felt himself going down, down.

Suddenly the foot of the coffin struck the rocks with force, and the casket burst open.

The next instant there was a splash, and Deadwood Dick found himself struggling in water, with the remains of the coffin on top of him. He had escaped death, so far, and had come through with whole limbs!

Deadwood Dick was not a devout person by any means, but was a believer in God, and in this instance he saw the hand of Providence in his timely deliverance.

Catching hold of the side pieces of the coffin, he used them to support his weight in the water, and listened. He heard nothing, save the noise of the water, and was soon carried away from the place.

Where he was being carried to, he could not guess, but he felt comparatively safe.

He knew he could not encounter worse dangers than those through which he had just passed.

In this manner something like half an hour was spent, though it seemed much longer to him, and then finally he found that he could discern objects.

Looking up, he saw the stars shining, and realized that he had come out of the underground passage.

Where he was he had no present means of knowing, but he was alive and well. And touching the bank, after a time, he caught hold of some bushes and pulled himself out of the stream.

Getting upon his feet, then, he raised his hand and made a vow that, if life was spared him, he would let those devils of Satan's Spring feel the strong arm of Deadwood Dick.

CHAPTER XIII.

LOOKING FOR A HUSBAND.

THAT day at Satan's Spring was uneventful. That is to say, it was so until mid-afternoon, or a little later.

Of course the sudden disappearance of Deadwood Dick and Austin Pilbrooke had been noticed before.

Many had inquired where the new "chief" was keeping himself, and Mr. Appleby had made inquiries as to Mr. Pilbrooke several times.

All that Baldy Benson had to say was that he did not know. Mr. Pilbrooke, he informed, had been found in the hall upstairs, considerably the worse for wine, and had been put to bed.

Neither he nor Bristol had come down to breakfast, and when a man was sent up to call them, they were not found in their rooms.

This was all that was known about them, or all that any one seemed able to tell.

Where they had gone, and why, so suddenly, were puzzling questions.

Said High-hoss Noah:

"They has got skart out, that's what's ther matter wi' Hanner. Ther young cuss war afeerd o' me, and ther old one didn't want ter see no more of this hyer kentry. And et ar' good fer ther health of ther youngster that he hev gone, too. I tells yer I meant ter chaw him all up ter-day, sure's he lived!"

But this brave assertion was hooted at, since Mr. High-hoss had already had ample opportunity to do his "chawing up."

Still Mr. Noah went around blowing about what he would do if "thet ar' fresh rooster"

ever made his appearance again at Satan's Spring.

A little after mid-afternoon the landlord of Grand Union received a call from up-stairs.

Mrs. Worthington, he was informed, wanted to see him at her room.

It had been let out by the lady that she was married.

Wondering what she could want, the worthy host put on his best smile and went up to ascertain.

He knocked at the door and was told to enter, and going in, found the woman seated in a rocker near a window.

"Come in, Mr. Benson," she invited, "and sit down. I have something of importance to say to you."

Mine host put himself on the edge of a chair just within the door, and said he was at the service of his guest in any manner she might demand.

"I take it you are an honest man, Mr. Benson," the woman spoke next.

"Wull, er, yas, I opine I be," was the response.

The landlord appeared just a little uneasy, however, and wondered greatly what could be coming.

"And the guests of your house are under your protection," the woman went on.

"Ter be sure they is!" Baldy exclaimed. "Ef ary galoot hev said a word ter you thet—"

"No one has insulted me," the lady assured.

I want to inquire where Mr. Bristol is to-day."

The question was direct, and right to the point. The landlord began to fidget a little, and looked uneasy.

"A good many hev asked that aire question ter-day," he said. "I don't know. He ar' gone, an that's all I kin tell about et. I opine he an' Mr. Pilbrooke went off together."

"What! is Mr. Pilbrooke missing, too?"

"That's what he ar', ma'm."

"Have they not been in town to-day?"

"Not a shadder of 'em, ma'm."

"Then there is foul play back of this, and I call upon you to investigate the matter immediately. I have done wrong to put it off so long."

The landlord paled, and looked at the woman wonderingly.

"What do you know about et?" he demanded.

"I know too much about it," was the answer. "I heard two men in the room next to mine, yesterday, plot to drug Mr. Bristol and dispose of him."

"Thunder!" ejaculated the landlord, springing up.

His face was ashy, and his manner greatly excited.

"Beg yer pardon," he immediately added, "fer that aire cuss-word. Why didn't yer tell me off this sooner?"

"Because, first, I did not hear about the matter till nearly noon, and then I waited, hoping to hear that Mr. Bristol had returned. But, tell me, who were the men in that room yesterday about this hour?"

"They was two cusses what hev gone away now," was the answer to that. "They went off some time this forenoon. I opine we is too late ter git 'em now."

"Oh! why did I not make it my business to inquire for Mr. Bristol early this morning?"

"Ef would hev been jest ther proper thing to hev done, ma'm," Baldy assured.

"And now it is too late. But, you must have a search made, and that at once. I hold myself responsible, almost, for whatever may have happened."

"Et shall be done," Baldy promised, promptly. "But, kin I inquire ef Mr. Bristol was a relation o' yours?" he asked.

"He is nothing to me," was the answer. "I never saw him before yesterday, or rather the previous day on the stage, to be exact. Hearing the plot against him, however, I took occasion to warn him, and he promised me a service in return."

"Wull, ma'm, I'll do all I kin to'rds gittin' at this hyer thing, but et is ruther late now. Ef them fellers was his enemies, and they follied him hyer ter kill him, most likely they hev done et. I noticed that they got off in somethin' of a hurry. I'll see what kin be done."

"And you'll let me know what you learn?"

"Yas, ter be sure."

With that the landlord took his leave from the room, and returned below.

A troubled look was on his face, and as he made his way down the stairs he was muttering to himself.

"This hyer beats ther devil," he was saying. "Et never rains but et pours, by mighty. I'd like ter know what sort of er iron this woman has got in ther fire. Et ar' mighty queer all her meals hev ter be carried to her room. Durn me ef I don't put a stop to that aire. But, then, how kin I?"

Whatever action he meant to take, he seemed in no hurry about it, but took his place behind the bar as usual, without saying anything about the matter to any one.

It was true that this woman had not yet made her appearance at the table at any meal.

But this could not be said of the later arrival, Rose Denmore.

She seemed to be the admired of all admirers.

Promptly on hand at meal-time, she was the life of the board, and seemed to be an especial attraction for Hubert Watkyns.

Whether the two were anything to each other, could not be said, but they had certainly become friendly enough at the table, though no one had thus far seen them in each other's company at any other time.

That day the stage came on time, as on the previous.

It was Ribbon Johnny's trip, and he drew up in front of the Grand Union in his usual style.

These stages, whether we have mentioned it or not, returned light, after making a trip, or nearly light, for it was seldom they had a passenger going south. And they passed Satan's Spring after midnight.

"Whoop!" Ribbon Johnny sung out, as his old "hearse" came to the stopping-place. "Whoop! Stop when I tells yer, Polly, er I'm a pickled onion ef I don't lift a blister on yer old hide! Hyer we is, pilgrims, and hyer we stops over."

The stage was well filled, and the passengers began to unload themselves as soon as it stopped.

The last to get out was a woman.

This time it was a woman of uncertain age. She was clad in a peculiar and out-of-date way, wearing a big shaker bonnet and blue goggles. In one hand she carried an umbrella, worn and baggy, and in the other an old-fashioned carpet-bag.

She drew immediate attention, and some one in the crowd ventured that she was a woman's-rights advocate.

Stopping for a moment, when she had got herself and her traps out of the stage all in good order, she glared around at the faces about her, as though looking for some one whom she expected to meet.

Not finding the person, evidently, she gave a sniff of disgust, as it was taken to be, and marched up the steps to the piazza.

She did not take the trouble to look for the private entrance, but marched right on into the bar-room.

There she stopped and glared around again.

Not finding the object of her search there, she advanced to the bar, bringing her umbrella down upon it with a thwack that made Baldy Benson jump.

"Dew yeou know Ezekiel Wiggles, mister?" she inquired.

"N—no, I don't opine I do," Baldy assured.

"He's the critter I'm a-lookin' fur, he is," the woman declared. "He's my husband, Ezekiel Wiggles is, what's gone and deserted me, and I'm goin' tew find him if I have tew scour the univarse tew dew it."

"I never heard that aire name afore, I'm sure," said the landlord.

"Mebby he's gone tew work and changed it. It would be jest like him tew dew it."

"What sort o' lookin' man was he?" some one inquired.

"Why, he was biggish like, some six foot in his socks or so, and had lots o' red hair an whiskers."

"Mebbe et ar' High-hoss Noah," was suggested, as the description seemed to fit him.

"And who is that critter?" the woman demanded.

"Oh, he's a galoot what has been 'round hyer fer some time," explained Baldy.

"All right, I'll take a look at him when I have had somethin' tew eat. Kin I get that here, mister, and a place tew sleep?"

"Yas, I opine we kin fit ye out," the landlord assured. "Jest 'scribe yer name on ther register hyer, and I'll book ye fer a room."

The woman dropped her carpet-bag and umbrella, and grasped the pen. She had on old-style black mitts, but as the fingers were free, she did not remove them. She jerked the book around, and penned her name carefully—"Experience Wiggles."

"Theer," she said, as she laid down the pen,

"this is me, and that's my name. Experience by name, and experience I've had. The saddest experience I ever have had, howsumdever, has been my search fur Ezekiel Wiggles. He got mad when I wanted him tew saw wood by moonlight, and when I throwed him down stairs he vowed he'd leave me, and he done it. But, let me set eyes on him, and if I don't break him in two over a saw-buck, it will be funny."

This raised a laugh, and in the midst of it who should walk into the room but High-hoss Noah.

The attention of Experience Wiggles was called to him.

CHAPTER XIV.

DICK AGAIN ON DECK.

The woman in the shaker and blue goggles looked at Mr. High-hoss.

And he looked at her, not knowing anything of the situation, wondering what she could possibly want with him.

When she had surveyed him for a moment, silently, she gripped her old umbrella and started toward him with long, business-like strides.

She marched right up to him, and shaking the umbrella under his nose, made the demand:

"See hyer, be yeou Ezekiel Wiggles?"

"Be I what?" asked High-hoss, amazed.

"I say, be yeou Ezekiel Wiggles?" the woman repeated.

"I don't reckon I'm any sich cuss, ma'm," the fellow declared, loudly.

"Don't yeou lie tew me, Zeke Wiggles, if it is yeou?" the woman warned, and she shook her umbrella under his nose again. "If yeou ain't my Zeke, yeou look enough like him tew be his twin brother."

"Keep yer durn old rain-ketcher out o' my face!" snapped High-hoss, giving it a knock aside. "I ain't your Zeke, not by er gol durn sight I ain't! Ef I was, hang me fer a sick cat ef I wouldn't go jump in ther spring an' stay that!"

"If yeou was," put in the woman, "yeou wouldn't jump in no spring, yeou wouldn't, but yeou might git pitched in and I'd be the one tew dew it. If yeou are my Zeke, I kin lick ye, and yeou know I kin tew. And I'm not sartain yet that yeou ain't the critter I'm lookin' fur, nuther."

"Haw! haw! haw! the fellow forced a laugh. "Throw me inter ther spring, you? Et would take a man ter do that aire leetle trick, it would."

"About ther size of the feller what did do et, eh?" some one sang out.

"You mind yer own business!" snapped High-hoss. "And you, woman, git out of my way. I ain't ther man you is lookin' fer."

"I don't know about that theer," the woman persisted. "You look like my Zeke, and yeou talk like him, tew, and I want proof afore I let ye go."

"Afore ye let me go! Haw! haw! haw! Thet aire ar' good, et ar'. But, what proof d'ye want?"

"If yeou are my Zeke, yeou have got a scar on yer right arm, near the shoulder, where I cut ye once with a rawhide. I demand tew see with my own eyes if yeou have sich a mark on ye."

"And I'm durned ef ye will see!" cried High-hoss.

"I won't, won't I?" and that umbrella began to flourish again.

"No, yer won't, won't yer!" the bullwhacker roared.

"I appeal to the crowd," cried the woman. "Ain't it fair he should show me?" she demanded.

There was a loud and general cry of approval, and the bullwhacker was told to take off his coat.

High-hoss argued the point, but, eager for the fun, the whole crowd was set against him.

"Wull, ef yer must see, durn yer, see!" he finally cried, and he jerked off his coat and rolled up his sleeve.

The woman made a close inspection of his arm, but finding no scar there, had to be satisfied that he was not her lost Ezekiel.

"No, yeou ain't my Zeke," she admitted, "but yeou dew look enough like him tew be his twin."

"Bet yer life I ain't yer Zeke!" the bullwhacker cried. "Ef I war, and you'd ever a' hit me with er whip, you wouldn't be hyer to tell about et."

"Baah!" the woman scorned. "Yeou kin talk 'most as brave as my Zeke could, and he couldn't lick a baby. I must hit ye once, jest fur Zeke's sake, and jest tew give ye a taste of what you'd a' got if yeou had been him. Take that, and that!"

With the words, she raised the old umbrella

and slashed away, giving it to the bullwhacker first on one ear and then on the other.

"Whoop!" High-hoss screamed, and he made a dash at the woman; but the crowd held him back.

"Yer can't fight no wimmen," they told him, and he was soon hustled out of doors, amid all sorts of jibes and jeers.

When he was gone, the woman turned back to the bar, asking to be shown to her room.

She was obliged promptly, and was not seen again, as she ordered her supper brought to her.

Said Baldy Benson:

"This hyer ar' a new wrinkle ther wimmin hev got. They is gittin' too delleket ter walk down stairs to their rations. But, I'll put a stop ter that, see ef I don't. But, how'm I goin' ter do et? I won't begin on Experience Wiggles, anyhow."

When the supper bell had rung, and after her supper had been brought to her, Mrs. Wiggles peered cautiously out of her room.

No one was in the hall, and she crept out stealthily, glided to another door, and knocked.

She was invited to enter, and did so, finding herself in the presence of Mrs. Worthington.

That lady looked at her in amazement, wondering who she could be.

"I beg your pardon," said Experience, "but I have a word to say to you. You do not know me, but I am a friend!"

"And who are you?" was the natural question.

"I am known here as Experience Wiggles. You may call me by that name. I come to you with a message from Deadwood Dick."

"Ha! he is alive then?"

"Yes, alive and well, but he dare not be seen here again just now. He says he pledged his help to you in some matter or other. He has sent me to learn the particulars. If he is needed immediately he will come. If not, he wants to know when he will be required."

Followed then an earnest conversation, lasting for several minutes, when, it being ended, Experience Wiggles returned to her own room.

She had not been gone long when Mrs. Worthington began to grow unusually sleepy.

Not knowing what to make of it, she finished her tea, and then threw herself upon the bed, thinking it would pass off.

She was asleep immediately, and knew no more.

When Mrs. Wiggles returned to her room, she ate the supper that had been provided for her, and by the time she had done, it was beginning to grow dark.

A woman soon came to her room, bringing a candle, and took away the dishes.

As she went out, Mrs. Wiggles said:

"Ezekiel allus used tew say I was a oncommon sleepy-head, and I guess he was right. I'll say good-night tew yeou, fur I shan't be long out o' bed."

The woman smiled, responded to the good-night, and went away.

Experience Wiggles closed the door after her, and locked it, and then took off her blue goggles.

And not only that, but a wig, too, was taken off, when, lo! the face that was revealed was that of Deadwood Dick!

Yes, his face it was, but lacking the fine mustache, which he had to sacrifice in adopting a disguise of this sort.

"Well, here I am, back again," he mused, "and now for war to the knife. I got the worst of it, the first round, but we will see who will come out ahead on the second."

He took off the dress he had on, and was in just the attire necessary for a desperate struggle. He had on a flannel shirt, a pair of rough trowsers, and a belt that bristled with weapons.

Putting away the dress, shawl, and other things that had gone to make up his disguise, he looked well to his weapons.

"Now," he said to himself, "I am ready for the business. As soon as this house is asleep, I intend to explore it well."

Your detective has to have patience, and Dick had that.

Putting out his light, he pulled up the curtain at the window, and for a long time watched the scene on the Plaza.

Hours passed, and at last the Square was deserted.

Another hour, and the house was as quiet as a grave, so far as Dick's ears could discover.

Now was his time for action, and he rose, put on his hat, which he had had in the old carpet-bag, with other things, and stepped to the door.

There he stopped to listen again, and had his hand on the knob, just ready to open the door,

when he fancied he heard steps in the hall, and he hesitated.

He listened attentively, and soon discovered that he had not been mistaken.

Stealthy steps passed his door.

When they had passed, he drew the door open just a little, and looked out.

There was a candle at the end of the hall, and by its light he discerned two men.

They had their backs toward him, and while he looked, they stopped at the door of Mrs. Worthington's room, and one entered.

Dick's hand fell upon a weapon.

He did not want to be discovered, but if necessary—

Other steps were heard, and another man passed down the hall.

He too entered the room, the other man still remaining on guard, looking up and down the hall.

A moment passed, and no sound was heard.

Could it be that they were murdering the woman?

That thought came to Dick, and he was just on the point of springing out when the men reappeared.

And between them they carried the sleeping woman, who was entirely unconscious and helpless in their power.

Deadwood Dick's teeth came together with a click, and, weapon in hand, he had almost sprung out, when a sudden thought checked him.

Perhaps this was another victim for the death chamber in the hidden cavern. By following, perhaps he would be able to discover that, and come the sooner to the rescue of Mr. Pilbrooke, if he was alive.

When the men with their burden had passed his door, and had begun to descend the stairs, Dick slipped out and crept after them.

When they reached the lower floor, they turned and went along the hall to the rear, entering the kitchen.

Dick crept on after them, with the stealth of a cat.

At the foot of the stairs the man ahead had picked up a candle, and Dick could easily follow the light as long as it could be seen.

They had not closed the door of the kitchen quite tight, and Dick was soon there, peering in.

The men were just disappearing through another door, and he heard their light tread on another flight of stairs.

He rightly guessed that they were going to the cellar, or to some sort of hole under the house, and when they had gone on a little, followed after.

CHAPTER XV.

DICK GETS THE DAISY DROP.

THIS door then had closed after them.

They had not fastened it, however, and Dick opened it silently.

When he looked down, the men had reached the bottom, and were out of sight from where he stood.

The light was there yet, and for the present he did not venture any further. Discovery was the very last thing to be desired, now.

Whispering was heard among the men for a moment; then the light moved, the foot of the stairs was thrown into shadow, and a breath of cold, damp air struck Dick's face.

Has it been mentioned that he had previously muffled his feet, so that he could explore the house without making a sound? Such was the fact, anyhow, and when he went on down this flight of stairs he moved as silently as a ghost might be expected to move.

None of these men had he recognized, owing to the faint light of the upper hall when he had seen them there, and to the fact that they wore half masks over their faces.

When he reached the bottom of the stairs, he discerned the rays from the candle up through a hole in the middle of the floor.

He hastened forward and looked down, wanting to get a survey of the hole before the light might disappear.

To his surprise, he beheld a series of ladders leading down into what seemed a natural cavern.

"Ha!" he exclaimed in thought, "this explains it! This is the way I was taken after I was drugged. This is a part of the cavern I was in when they tried to end my earthly sojourn."

The men, with their burden, were about half way down the ladders.

Dick waited until they had reached the bottom and turned away, before he set foot upon the ladders himself.

He feared that his presence might be felt, if he tried to descend sooner, so held back.

As soon as they were clear of it, and moving on, then he made haste to go down.

When he in turn reached the bottom, the light of the candle was some distance away to the right, following a passage of the cavern.

"Lead on, my fine rascals!" Deadwood Dick muttered grimly. "There is a day of reckoning coming, if I mistake not. I want to see what you intend doing with that woman."

Without mentioning all the windings and turnings of the way, and how Dick had to use extreme caution now and again, let us say that the destination was finally reached, and once more Dick beheld the cavern in which he had so nearly lost his life.

Stopping in the deep shadow, in the opening that led into this chamber, the daring detective took a survey of the interior.

The first person to meet his gaze was Captain Death.

There he was, in his usual hideous form.

Besides him, there were some seven or eight others, including the three who had just come in with the woman.

Dick looked around eagerly for Mr. Pilbrooke.

Not seeing him at first, he feared the worst had happened, but, presently, he caught sight of him, on the floor behind some of the men.

Captain Death glanced at the woman, when she was laid on the floor, saying:

"So, this is the one who would make a disturbance about Deadwood Dick, is it? We shall have to see that she never wakes up."

"Et looks kinder tough ter make war against women, too," one of the masked men observed.

"We recognize nothing in sex, when our safety is concerned," said Captain Death, sternly.

"Well, what is going to be done?" another asked.

"We will put them out of the way," answered Captain Death, "and make the shortest possible work of it."

"Mercy!" cried Mr. Pilbrooke, at these words.

"Do you not mean to accept the offer I have made for my life?"

"Can't do it," answered the skeleton ring-leader. "It is too big a risk for us to undertake. You will have to pass in your chips."

The poor man sunk down upon the floor with a groan.

"The curse of heaven rest upon you for this!" he moaned. "You rob me of life, and my family of a husband and father. Oh! but your day of reckoning will come! It must come!"

"We'll take chances on that," was the careless answer. "Come, men, pick the old coward up and stand him against the wall, and we'll riddle him wth bullets. If he won't stand, two of you will have to hold him."

Deadwood Dick stood ready for the desperate encounter that must come.

His teeth were hard set, and his weapons were in hand. Not a thought of mercy to such merciless men as these was in his purpose.

Four of the men had rifles, as on the other occasion.

At the order given by the captain, they laid them down, not far from the opening, and threw themselves upon Mr. Pilbrooke.

"Come, governor," one of them cried, "you must stand up and take your little dose of pills like a man. It won't hurt you much. It will be over before you can wink your eye."

"Spare me! spare me!" the despairing man cried. "All my wealth will I give you, if you will only let me return to my home and family."

"No use whining," said Captain Death. "We cannot afford to let you go with the information you have got. Die you must, so make up your mind to it."

The men had jerked their prisoner to his feet, and now they back him up against the wall, in the place where Deadwood Dick had been shot at.

But, no sooner had they let go of him, than he dropped limp and helpless to the ground.

"Untie his hands," ordered the captain, "and two of you hold him up by his arms."

This was speedily done, and two of the inhuman wretches held Mr. Pilbrooke up by his arms, despite his struggles, while the four turned to take up their rifles.

Then the gleaming revolvers of Deadwood Dick covered them!

Gliding silently into the chamber, he planted his feet upon the rifles, and was waiting for the rascals to turn toward him.

It was desperate odds to fight against, but Dick Bristol knew not the word fear, nor would he hold back in a case of this sort, no matter what the outcome.

"Up with your hands, you devils!" he cried.

The men stopped short, for the instant paralyzed, while Captain Death wheeled around with an oath, his hand falling upon a weapon.

"Hands up!" Dick ordered again.

Two or three obeyed; but, not so Captain Death.

"Never!" he cried, snatching a weapon from his belt. "We'll die first!"

Dick's revolver spoke, sending a bullet straight for the rascal's heart, but without effect, other than to send a bullet wide of the mark that came at almost the same instant from the outlaw's weapon.

Dick fired again, now a snap-shot at one of the eye-holes of the grinning death's-head, and Captain Death went down, another shot from his weapon going even wider of the mark than the first.

These shots were exchanged in a second of time, and others of the rascals were reaching for their revolvers.

Dick fired twice again, in quick succession, and down went two more of them.

"Hands up!" he ordered yet again, "or it's death to all of you! Deadwood Dick holds the drop on you this time, you devils!"

"Thank God for this rescue!" cried Mr. Pilbrooke.

"Your hands are free, sir," said Dick; "step over here and pick up one of the rifles and cover the dogs with it."

Mr. Pilbrooke made haste to obey.

"And if one of them lowers a hand, shoot him as you would a cur!"

"So I will, as sure as I live."

Ordering the rascals to stand together, Dick put his weapons back into his belt and advanced upon them.

Half a minute later they were handcuffed together in pairs, and disarmed.

About the time that was done the woman on the floor began to come to, and sat up, looking around in affright.

"Where am I?" she gasped.

Mr. Pilbrooke looked at her, startled.

"My God!" he cried, "it is my daughter! my long-lost child!"

The woman looked at him, wildly, wonderfully, and uttering the word "father!" covered her face with her hands.

Deadwood Dick looked from one to the other of them, puzzled to understand.

What manner of revelation was this going to be?

Mr. Pilbrooke had lowered the rifle, seeing there was no further need of it, and now he dropped it and sprung to the woman's side.

"Jessie, Jessie!" he cried, taking her hands, "tell me if it is indeed you!"

"Yes, father, it is I," the woman sorrowfully answered.

"Thank Heaven for this!"

"Then you forgive me, father?" she asked.

"Freely and fully," was the answer. "You have been forgiven all these years, but we knew not where to find you."

Deadwood Dick did not interfere until their talk was done.

From their conversation he learned all, and was glad to see the happy meeting between the father and wayward child.

When Mr. Pilbrooke rose, he turned to Dick, saying:

"Pardon me, sir, but from what you have heard you will understand. This is my daughter, who, strong-willed, disobeyed me and married against my wishes, and whom I, in a fit of rage, turned from my house. From that hour to this I had never heard from her, though I longed to call her back and tell her she was forgiven."

"I understand all," said Dick. "You came near sharing the same cruel fate together here this hour."

"But, how came I here?" the woman asked.

"You have not told me. What were they going to do with us?"

"You were near to death," explained Dick. "For what you overheard yesterday, and repeated to the landlord of the Grand Union, they intended to put you out of the way."

"Is it possible! Then the landlord was—"

"As great a rascal as any of them," finished Dick. "Here he is, to answer for himself," and, stepping up to one of the prisoners, he snatched off his mask, and it was Baldy Benson!

The masks of the others were torn off, and there stood Casper Appleby, the man Bakers, who had been at the head of the escort that had been sent with the stage, and others who had been his men. To Mr. Pilbrooke it was a revelation such as he had never dreamed of, before Dick had warned him.

CHAPTER XVI.

"ALL HANDS AROUND."

BRISTOL and Mr. Pilbrooke held a consultation.

It was decided that Dick should conduct Mrs. Worthington—as we will still call her—back to the hotel.

While he was gone, Mr. Pilbrooke would remain as guard over the manacled prisoners, and Dick would bring back help with him to take them out.

"So Dick and the lady set out, and in due season Mrs. Worthington was again in her room. And their return had been as silent as had been the movements of the outlaws in taking her away.

Deadwood Dick knew of but one person on whom to rely in this emergency, and this was, Ribbon Johnny, the stage-driver.

Happening to know that he slept in a little room off the bar-room, he went there and tried the door.

It was not secured, and stepping in, he gave the rugged old driver a shake to rouse him.

"Whoa!" the driver cried. "Stop yer jerkin', Polly, er I'm a stump-tailed coyote ef I don't make yer nose bleed. What is ther— Eh?"

"Shut your mouth," Dick whispered, "and listen."

"Wull, what ar' et?" the man asked.

"I have captured the road-agent band, Johnny, and I want your assistance to bring them in. They are all disarmed and handcuffed, what are not dead."

"Ther dickens ye hev! And who be you, anyhow?"

"I'm Dick Bristol, your passenger of the other day."

"Ther feller what done et up so neat fer High-hoss Noah?"

"The same. But, come, for we have work to do before morning."

"I'm with yer, you bet!"

In a few minutes Ribbon Johnny was ready, and Deadwood Dick led the way to the cavern chamber where the prisoners were.

When he saw who they were, the driver's surprise hardly knew bounds.

The dead men were carried out first, and laid out on the floor in the bar-room of the hotel.

Then the prisoners were marched out, taken to the same place, and there kept until morning dawned and the town awoke.

Meantime Deadwood Dick had not been idle; he had given the cavern a thorough exploration, and had made many discoveries—one of which was a passage leading from the cavern to the office of the Little Joker!

In this place, in a sort of niche cut in the rock, was found a great amount of bullion, and other stolen property of value.

Following another branch of the cavern, Dick finally came to a place where he heard the neigh of a horse, and going on, came into a temporary stable.

Here were several horses, and on a heap of blankets not far away was a man. Dick woke him with the cold muzzle of a revolver on his face, and the fellow proved to be High-hoss Noah.

He sprung up with an oath of surprise, but, Dick had him covered, and soon had him disarmed and bound.

That done, Dick looked around further, and there was the robe that Captain Death's horse had always worn! And he found that it was lined with heavy mail!

This discovery had already been made in respect to Captain Death himself. Under his hideous disguise, was a coat of mail that was bullet-proof. And the disguise, that was a close-fitting black cloth covering, with the figure of a skeleton outlined upon it in luminous paint.

It was the same with the head-covering. That was steel-lined, but Deadwood Dick's snap-shot at one of the eyes had found the weak point, and had cost the outlaw his life.

And Captain Death, who was he? Be patient for a moment, and we shall see.

When the town began to stir, that morning, there was excitement on the Plaza.

Experience Wiggles was out there, carpet-bag, umbrella, blue goggles and all, and was letting her voice be heard.

"No," she cried, in her high and squeaky voice, "I hain't found my Ezekiel, yeou gappin' cedjits, yeou! No, I hain't found him, but I have had jest the reddest red-hot time yeou ever heerd tell on."

"What's the matter, aunty?" was asked. "Hev ye got 'em this mornin'? What seems ter be ther diffikeltly with yer?"

"Oh! ther's nothin' much the trouble, yeou

poor fools," she responded, "but if some of yeou had been in my boots last night ther might 'a' been. Why, I've been on a reg'l'r old rampage all night. No nightmare that yeou ever heerd on could hold a candle tew it."

"But, what hev yer been doin'?" was asked.

It had not taken long to draw a big crowd, and the loud laughing of the men brought others every moment.

"What hev I been a-doin'? Why bless yer hearts, children, I hev been after your road-agent, Captain Death. And, what's more, I've got him too!"

"What! Got Captain Death! You?"

"Bet your life!" was the response.

"And where is he? What have ye done with him?"

Deadwood Dick gave a loud whistle, the doors of the hotel opened, and two men came out, carrying Captain Death's body between them.

The men were Mr. Philbrooke and Ribbon Johnny, and they laid the body on the piazza at the top of the steps, where all might see it plainly.

"Who is he?" was the eager demand.

Dick had sprung up on the piazza, and now stood behind the body.

"You ask who he is," he said, in his natural voice: "you shall see. Ribbon Johnny, remove that head-piece."

The stage-driver did so, and to the almost paralyzing surprise of everybody, the face of Gerald Appleby was disclosed to view!

"And who in blazes be *you*?" was the next demand.

This was made of the disguised detective and he answered their question at once.

Taking off his glasses, bonnet and wig, Dick made a bow to the crowd, and said:

"You ask who I am, gentlemen; I am Richard M. Bristol, better known as Detective Deadwood Dick, Junior."

A howl went up immediately. His name of course was known to many, as Deadwood Dick, and they gave him a rousing cheer. And while that was going on, Dick cast off the rest of his disguise.

The prisoners were then brought out, and Dick made his charge against them, telling the story in full.

"You see," he concluded, "the chief devils of all were Appleby and his son. I never met with two worse characters in all my career as a detective. Not content with their share of the profits of the mine, and their salaries as manager and clerk, they made up their minds to have all. They made up this pretty scheme. And in order to carry it on without being suspected, they had to rob the stage once in a while when it had no bullion aboard."

While this was going on, a horseman was seen to come out from the direction of the hotel stables.

It was Hubert Watkyns, and he headed up the valley at a walk.

Barely had he started, however, when a woman's voice rung out, ordering him to stop.

He turned, saw Mrs. Worthington on the piazza, and putting spurs to the animal he was on, started off at a run.

The woman instantly raised a pistol and fired after him, but missed.

Not so Deadwood Dick. Drawing a revolver, he raised it and fired, and the horse fell in its tracks.

"Come back here," Dick ordered, as soon as Watkyns got up, "or you will get the same."

The fellow came back, with a great show of bluster, demanding to know why he had been shot at.

"Ask your wife here that question," retorted Dick, indicating Mrs. Worthington.

"His wife!" cried another voice.

It was Rose Denmore, pale to the lips.

"Yes, his wife, Rose Denmore," repeated Mrs. Worthington. "I followed him and you here, to prevent his marrying you, as I happened to learn you and he had planned. He is a villain only to be despised. Be thankful you have escaped, and take my advice and return home to your parents."

Something of a scene followed that, as can be imagined.

Watkyns was forced to acknowledge the truth, and the citizens of Satan's Spring fell upon him and gave him a good whipping at the stake, and when they had done with him, Deadwood Dick put him under arrest.

He it was who had informed against Dick, having seen him somewhere to know him, and he was also concerned with the Applebys in their schemes.

It was he who had left the note at the bar for Dick on the night of his arrival there, and the

Applebys were they who had been at the bottom of the placing of the coffin in Dick's room.

Satan's Spring went wild.

Deadwood Dick tried to have order rule, but he had no power to back his authority, being almost alone, and the result was that Judge Lynch took the matter in hand, and the rascals were promptly disposed of, every one of them!

Austin Pilbrooke took charge of the mine, and notified the other owners of what had taken place. It was soon put into honest hands, and from that time paid big returns on the money invested. It was a paying thing, and always had been.

Mr. Pilbrooke did not remain there but went home as soon as he could, taking his daughter with him. And their parting with Deadwood Dick was one to be remembered.

Dick was paid the ten thousand dollars reward that had been offered, having fairly earned it, and, when Ribbon Johnny went on from Satan's Spring one morning, he was once again a passenger.

Satan's Spring is still there, though it may have a new name by this time, but there are many in the town who well remember Deadwood Dick's short sojourn among them, and there are some who never tire of telling about the daring road-agent of Devil Canyon, and about how Deadwood Dick brought his career to a timely close by his "daisy drop," as everybody there called it.

THE END.

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